



**THE AUTHOR**

*(from a photograph by Charles Tomlinson)*

H. M. TOMLINSON

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# The Face of the Earth

WITH SOME HINTS FOR  
THOSE ABOUT TO TRAVEL

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## FOREWORD

THESE remembrances of things seen in travel have been salvaged from books lost in the last war. They are all of chance; tokens of the good of the earth noticed by the wayside while getting about. It was thought proper to save them; oblivion is inevitable, but it need not come too soon. That is as much as I can say in explanation of the rescue of these keepsakes, which are but personal, from the rubble of the past. They come of journeys to distant coasts, as well as of but running round the corner. They are of many years. *The Devon Estuary* is in the light that was at the beginning of this century. *The Chesil Bank* shows in the years that came between the wars. *A Spanish Journey* is all I know of Spain, and as an addition to knowledge of that country could be omitted; but it remains incredible to me still that, immediately after the fall of the Spanish monarchy, I found myself travelling about that fabulous land in the company of James Bone, and the late Robert Lynd and Horace Horsnell. Such a chance adventure, with such men, though brief, suffices for a lifetime.

H.M.T

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A NORTH DEVON ESTUARY  
1912

## A NORTH DEVON ESTUARY

### I

IT was decided that someone must stand by the boat. There was an uncertainty about the tide, and there might be a need to moor her elsewhere. The other two members of the crew did not propose a gamble to decide which one of the three of us should stay with her while the other two went into the town. I was told off as watchman at once by the democratic majority, and it was clear that in this the rest of the crew knew they were doing the right thing. Their decision was just. It was I who was to be left. It is the lot of the irresolute to get left, though sometimes the process is called the will of God. The boat, with me in it, was abandoned. The two of us had to make the most of each other for an indefinite time.

Perhaps the boat, being a boat of character and experience, had no confidence in her protector, because after a spell of perfect quietude, in which I thought she slept, without warning she began to butt the quay wall impatiently. She was peevishly awake. But I was not going to begin by showing docile haste when a creature named *Brunhilda* demanded my attention insistently. Instead, I leisurely filled my pipe and lit it, took half a dozen absent-minded draws at it, and then went forward idly and lengthened the mooring-line. The boat fell asleep again at once.

Our line was fast to a ring-bolt which possibly was in the old stonework of that quay wall when the ships which moored there were those that made of a voyage to America a new and grand adventure. That ring-bolt was rust chiefly. Its colour was deep and rich. With the sun on it, the iron circle on its stem might have been a strange crimson sea-

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flower pendent from the rock over the tide. A precipitous flight of unequal steps ran from the top of the quay down its face to the water. The steps continued under the water, but I don't know how far. They dissolved. Of the submerged steps I could not count below the sixth, and even the fourth and fifth were dim in a submarine twilight. The tread of the midway step, which was near my face and just below it, was uncertain whether it ought to be above water or sunk. Sometimes, when I looked that way, it was under a few inches of glass, but as I looked the glass would become fluid and pour noiselessly from it. Once when the glass covered it I noticed an olive-green crab was on the step, set there, as it were, in crystal. When he darted sideways it seemed unnatural, and as if he were alive and free. It was when he moved that I began to suspect that many affairs, an incessant but silent business of life, were going on around me and under the boat.

The water was as still and clear as the air. It seemed but little denser. It was only the apparition of water. It was tinted so faint a beryl that I knew when my fingers touched it only because it was cold, and the air was hot. When first I glanced overside it was like peering into nothing, or at most at something just substantial enough to embody shadows. So I enjoyed the boat, which was tangible. The bleached woodwork of the little craft had stored the sun's heat. Perhaps, though, it was full of the heat of past summers, even of the tropics, and its curious smells were its memories of many creeks and harbours. It had been a ship's boat. In its time it may have been moored to mangrove roots. It had travelled far. I don't know when I enjoyed a pipe so much. The water was talking to itself under the boat. We were sunk three fathoms below the top of the quay, out of sight of the world. I could see nothing living but a scattered area of sea-birds resting on the tide. One of the birds, detached, a black-headed gull, was so close that the pencilled lines of his plumage were plain. He cocked an eye at me inquiringly. He came still closer, of his own will or through



the will of the tide—there was no telling—and we stared frankly at each other; and I think I may believe he admitted me as a member of whatever society he knows. Not a word was said, nor a sign-made, but something passed between us which gave everything a value unfamiliar but, I am confident, more nearly a right value. This made me uncertain as to what might happen next. I felt I was the discoverer of this place. It was doubtful whether it had ever been seen before. I had accidentally chanced upon its reality. As to those stone steps, I had been up and down them often enough in other years, but I had the feeling they were new to me this morning, that they turned to me another and unsuspected aspect. It was in such a moment that I first saw the crab at my elbow, and when he darted sideways it was as if he were moved by a secret impulse outside himself, the same power which moved the gull towards me, and which pulled the water off the step.

I looked overside to see whether this power were visible, and what it was like. There was six feet of water between me and the wall, and its surface was in the shadow of the boat; but the sunlight, at the same time, passed under the keel of the boat, so between my craft and the wall I could see to a surprising illuminated depth. The steps that were submarine were hung with algæ; near the surface of the water their fronds were individual and bright, but they descended and faded into mystery and the half-seen. Some of the larger shapes far below, whatever they were, seemed to be in ambush under the boat, and what they were waiting for in a world so dim, removed, and strange I preferred not to consider, on a fine day. Those lurking forms, which might have been nether darkness itself becoming arborescent wherever sunlight could sink down to it and touch its unfashioned mirk into what was lifelike, were eternally patient and still, as confident as things may be which wait in the place where we are told all life began. Midway between the keel of the boat and that lower gloom a glittering little cloud was suspensory. Each atom of it in turn caught a

glint of sunlight, and became for an instant an emerald point, a star in the fathoms. But I was not the first to detect that shoal of embryonic life. A pale arrow shot upwards from the shadows at the cloud, which instantly dispersed. That quick sand-eel missed his shot.

That cloud was alive: the water and the dark forest below were populated. The impulse which kept the water moving on and off the step—by now it was using another step for its play, for the tide was falling—continued to shoot flights of those silver arrows into the upper transparency. They flew out of the shadows into the light and were back again quicker than the eye could follow them, and as casually as though they had known this sort of thing for æons, the morsels of life suspended in the upper light parted and vanished to let the arrows through; then, as by magic, the glittering morsels reformed their company in the same place. No number of darting arrows could destroy their faith in whatever original word they once had been told.

There drifted into the space between the boat and the quay wall a vitreous hemisphere, a foot across. It had a pattern of violet hieroglyphics in the centre of its body. Its rim was flexible, and in regular spasms it contracted and expanded, rolling the medusa along. The creature darkened as it rolled in the shadow of the boat. It sank under me, and was suddenly illuminated, like a moon, as it entered the radiance beneath. It was while watching it that I noticed in the water some tinted sparks which I was ready to believe came of the quality of the sea itself, for I could see the water was charged with a virtue of immense power. When the jellyfish had gone I watched one of those glims, for it was not doused at once, but merely changed its colour. It moved close to the boat. The sparkling came from a globe of pure crystal, which was poised in the current on two filaments. The scintillating globe, no larger than a robin's egg, floated along in abandon in the world below my boat, sometimes bright in elfish emerald, and then changing to shimmering topaz. Scores of these tiny lamps

were burning below, now that my eyes were opened and I was aware. They had been suddenly filled, I suppose, by the power which pulsed the algæ, which had turned the medusa into a bright planet, shot the arrows, opened my own intelligence, and given sentience to the other atoms of drifting life. The water was constellated with these little globes changing their hues, and I remembered then that Barbellion once said a ctenophore in sunlight is the most beautiful thing in the world. . . .

There was a shout above me. The crew had returned. It wanted to know whether I was tired of waiting.

## II

We pushed out the boat, and our oars shattered the mirror and the revelation. Above the quay the white houses appeared, mounting a quick incline in chalk-like strata. They did not reach the ridge of the hill. The ridge was a wood dark against a cloud. Down-stream, at the end of the ridge, our river is met by another. They merge, and turn to go to sea. They become a gulf of confused currents and shoals in an exposed region of sandy desert, salting, and marsh, which ends seaward in the usual form of a hooked pebble bank. Beyond the bank and the breakers is a bay enclosed by two great headlands, thirty miles apart. The next land westward, straight out between the headlands, is America. A white stalk of a lighthouse stands amid the dunes, forlorn and fragile in that bright wilderness, a lamp at our door for travellers.

But we went up-stream. The tide here penetrates into the very hills. The exposed coils of roots, and the lower overhanging branches of oaks in precipitous valleys, which in aspect are remote from the coast, are submerged daily, and shelter marine crustacea; the foxgloves and ferns are just above the crabs, so where we grounded our boat, six miles from the lighthouse, the western ocean was as distant a thought as Siberia. On this still midsummer afternoon our lonely creek was the conventional picture of the tropics,

silent, vivid, and far. The creek—or pill, as the natives of the west country call it in their Anglo-Saxon—is, like all the best corners of the Estuary, uninhabited and unvisited. Perhaps the common notion of the tropics, a place of superb colours, with gracious palms, tree-ferns, and vines haunted by the birds of a milliner's dream, originated in the stage scenery of the *Girls from ho-ho* and other equatorial musical comedies, to which sailors have always given their hearty assent. That picture has seldom been denied. What traveller would have the heart to do it? The sons of Adam continue to hope that one day they may return to the Garden, and it would be cruel to warn them that this garden cannot be entered through the Malay Straits or by the Amazon or Congo. We ought to be allowed, I think, to keep a few odd illusions in a world grown so mimical to idle dreaming. For the jungle in reality is rather like mid-ocean where there is no help. The sea is monstrously active, but the jungle is no less fearful because it is quiet and still. It is not variously coloured. It has few graces. Once within its green wall, that metallic and monotonous wall, the traveller is daunted by a foreboding gloom and a silence older than the memories of Rheims and Canterbury. The picture is not of Paradise, but of eld and ruin. You see no flowers and hear no nightingales. Sometimes there is a distant cry, prompted, it might be guessed, by one of the miseries which Dante witnessed in a similar place. Yet whatever beings use equatorial forests for their purgatory, they remain discreetly hidden. Dante there could but peer into the shadows and listen to the agony of creatures unknown. The grotesque shapes about him would mock him with aloof immobility, and Dante presently would go mad. He would never write a poem about his experiences. I saw this when reading Bates's *Naturalist* again, while the crew of the *Brunhilda* gathered driftwood in a Devon creek to make a fire for tea. Bates does little to warn a reader that the forests of the Amazon are not a simple exaggeration of Jefferies' *Pageant of Summer*. And what a book, I saw then,

a man like Bates could have made of such a varied world as our Estuary! The range of life in this littoral, from the heather of the moors to the edge of the pelagic shelf where the continental mass of Europe drops to the abyss—a range, in places, of no more than ten miles—has not yet had its explorer and its chronicler. Yet I never saw in days of travel in the equatorial forest the hues and variety of form that were held in the vase shaped by the steep sides of our little west-country combe. A cascade of rose, purple, yellow, white and green was held narrowly by those converging slopes of bracken and oak scrub. That descent of colour was in movement, too, as a tumult would be, with the abrupt and ceaseless leaping and soaring of numberless red admiral, clouded yellow, peacock, fritillary, and white butterflies. On the foreshore, where a tiny stream emerged from this silent riot, a cormorant on a pile was black and sentinel. Kingfishers passed occasionally, flashes of blue light. It was the picture of the tropics as popularly imaged, but it was what travellers seldom see there.

## III

If there is a better window in the world than my port-light in Burra of this Estuary I do not know it. I look out on space from that opening in the topworks of a village which at night is amid the stars and in daylight is at sea. My cubicle is shady, but the light outside may be bright enough to be startling when of a morning it wakes me. I sit up in bed, wondering whether our ship is safe. The port-light seems too high and bright. The eyes are dazzled by the very chariot-spokes of Apollo, and ocean can be heard beneath me, vast and sonorous. The senses shrink, for they feel exposed and in danger. But all is well. Our ship that is between the sky and the deep has weathered more than two thousand years, and no more has happened to it than another fine day. Burra has not run into the sun.

From my bed to-day the first thing I saw was a meteor flaming alongside us. But my window kept pace with it.

The speed of the streaming meteor was terrific, but it could not pass us. Soon the meteor was resolved into the gilded vane of a topmast. I understood that a strange ship had come in. Nothing but time was passing my window. Yet still I had no doubt that the light in the east beyond the ship's vane, ascending splendid terraces of cloud to a choir which if empty, was so monitory that one felt trivial and unprepared beneath it for an announcement by an awful clarion was a light to test the worth of a dark and ancient craft like Burra. I listened for sounds of my fellow-travellers. They were silent. There was an ominous quiet, as if I were the first to know of this new day.

Then I just heard some subdued talk below, and the sounds of a boat moving away. As the speakers drew apart they called aloud. Yeo was off to fish by the Middle Ridge. The shipyard began its monody. One hears the shipyard only when its work begins. That means we are all awake. Those distant mallets continue in a level, confident chant, the recognised voice of our village. But by the time breakfast is over the fact that Burra is still building ships is no more remarkable than the other features of the Estuary: the ears forget the sound. Only if it ceased should we know that anything was wrong. For a minute or two, no doubt we should wonder what part of our life had stopped. But the hammering has not ceased here since the first galley was built which was before even the Danes began to raid us. The Danes found here, we have been told, seafarers as stout as themselves with ships as good as their own and got the lesson that, if quiet folk always acted with such fierce promptitude and resolution when interfered with then this would be an unlucky world for pirates.

Yet have no fear. I am not going to write a history of Burra. There was a time when I would have begun that history with no more dubiety than would a man an exposition of true morality. But the more we learn of a place the less is our confidence in what we know of it. We understand at last that the very stones mock our knowledge. They

have been there much longer. I do feel fairly certain, however, that absolute truth is not at the bottom of any particular well of ours. This village, which stands round the base of the hill where the moors decline to the sea and two rivers merge to form a gulf of light, is one I used to think was easily charted. But what do I know of it? The only certainty about it to-day is that it has a window which saves the trouble of searching for a better. Beyond that window the clouds are over the sea. The clouds are on their way. The waters are passing us. So, when I look out from my port-light to learn where we are, I can see for myself there may be something in that old legend of a great stone ship on an endless voyage. I think I may be one of its passengers. For where is Burra? I never know. The world I see beyond the window is always different. We reach every hour a region of the sky where man has never been before, so the astronomers tell us, and my window confirms it. Ours is a celestial voyage, and God knows where. So I dare not assume that I have the knowledge to write up the log-book of Burra. I should very much like to meet the man who could do it. We certainly have a latitude and longitude for the aid of commercial travellers and navigators who want our address, and it is clear that they, too, as they seem able to find us so easily, must be keeping pace with us; that they are on the same journey as ourselves, to the same distant and unknown star; but when one night I ventured to hint this surmise, as a joke, to an experienced sailor who came in for a pipe with me he said he had never heard<sup>at</sup> that particular star; all the stars he knew were named<sup>ni-</sup> and he said it was easy for him to lay a course for Burra an<sup>e</sup> and to keep it, just by dead reckoning. Besides—he <sup>seems</sup> out—how could a man learn his whereabouts from a ship's he didn't know and couldn't see?

Yes; how could he? But it is no joke. That<sup>of water</sup> had never heard of the perilous barque which<sup>because the</sup> have to keep pumped watertight, and to steer<sup>It prefers</sup> all soundings by a star whose right ascension

only by inference, and by faith that is sometimes as curiously deflected as is any compass

When taking bearings from my window, merely to get the time of day, I can see the edge of the quay below and a short length of it. That gives promise enough that Burra is of stout substance, and rides well. A landing-stage, a sort of stone gangway, is immediately under the window. Whoever comes aboard or leaves us, I can see them. At low tide these stone stairs go down to a shingle beach where ketches and schooners rest on their bilges, their masts at all angles. Corroded anchors and chains lie littered about. In summer-time I smell tar and marine dissolution. Morning and those stairs connect us with the fine things that the important people are doing everywhere. Open boats with lug-sails bring gossips and the news from the other side of the water, and on market-day bring farmers and their wives with baskets of eggs, cluckens, butter, and vegetables, and perhaps a party of tourists to gaze at us curiously and sometimes in disparagement. Few objects look so pleasant as a market-basket nearly full of apples and with some eggs on top. Yet it is well to admit, and here I do it, that there are visitors who call Burra a dull and dirty little hole.

Indeed there is no telling how even my window in Burra will take a man. Once I brought a friend to sit with me, so that he could watch the ferry and the boats, the dunes on the far side, and the clouds. I thought, with him as look-out astern, he could tell me when a ship came down river, and should warn him when I saw a vessel appear at the head-got (out of nowhere, apparently) and stand in for the fierce rage. What more could he want? But he said the then this is dead. He complained that nothing happened there.

Yet he knows what he wanted to happen there. It gives Burra time to think about. I always feel that plenty is history with me as I watch those open boats. When a of true moral is the equal of one of them in grace it is the is our confidence, national museum. But our men can build such at last that the are hours. The human mind, confused still



and thick with the dregs of the original mud, has clarified itself to that extent. It would not be easy to prove that man has made anything more beautiful than one of our boats. Its lines are as delicate and taut as a dove's. It is quick and strong, and it is so poised that it will change, when going about, as though taken by a sudden temerarious thought; and then in confidence it will lift and undulate on a new flight. The balance and proportions of its body accord with all one desires greatly to express, but cannot. In that it is something like music. The full satisfaction to be got from watching a huddle of these common craft, vivacious but with wings folded, and tethered by their heads to the landing-stairs, each as though eagerly looking for the man it knows, will send me to sleep in a profound assurance that all is well. For they seem proper in that world beyond my window, where there is the light and space of freedom. The tide is bright with its own virtue. The range of sand hills across the Estuary is not land, nothing that could be called soil, but is a promise, faint but golden, far in the future. You know that some day you will land there. But there is plenty of time for that. There is no need to hurry. One may rest.

After dark, like a fabulous creature, Burra vanishes. There is little here then, except an occasional and melancholy sound. I have for companionship at the window at night only a delicate star-cluster, low in the sky, which is another village on the opposite shore. Maybe Burra, too, is a star-cluster, when seen from the other stars, and from that distance perhaps appears so delicate as to make its indomitable twinkling wonderful on a windy night. There are a few yellow panes here after sunset, and they project beams across the quay, one to make a hovering ghost of a ship's figure-head, and another to create a lonely bollard—the last relic of the quay—and another to touch a tiny patch of water which is lively, but never flows away, perhaps because the Estuary has vanished and it has nowhere to go. It prefers to stay in the security of the beam till morning.

Now it is curious, but after dark, when our place has disappeared except for such chance fragments, and when to others we can be but a few unrelated glints among the other stars, that Burra is most populous, warm, and intimate. I see it then for what it is, a vantage for a few of us, who know each other, and who are isolated but feel secure in the unseen and hitherto untravelled region of space where the sun has abandoned us. All around us is bottomless night. Our nearest neighbour is another constellation.

## IV

I have learned at Burra that we townsfolk know nothing of the heavens. There are only wet days in the City, and fine. The clouds merely pass over London. They cross the street and are gone. They cast shadows on us, they make the place dark, they suggest, with a chill, that there are powers beyond our borders over which even the elders of the City have no jurisdiction. The day is fine again and we forget our premonition, it was only the weather.

The motor buses are all numbered and their routes are known, but the clouds are visitations, unannounced and inexplicable, warnings, which we disregard, that in truth we do not know where our city is. We cannot distinguish one cloud from another, because the narrow measure of heaven for each street allows us but an arc of a celestial coast, or one summit of a white range, before that high continent has more than suggested its magnitude we see the bus we want, or go down a side turning.

Doubtless the meagre outlook of this imprisonment from the heavens must have its effect upon us. Our eyes go no more to the sky than they do the hills. We have acquired, if we have not inherited, the characteristic of downcast eyes. Where there is no horizon there may be work, but no hope, and so we begin to see the way to account for the cynical humour of the Cockney. We say, in friendly derision, that they who look upwards more than can be justified by the rules of our busy community are star gazers. When

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distant glinting of the breakers on the bar. The sea had the burnish of dull metal. The distant headlands were but faint outlines, and they might have been poised aloft, for there was as much light under them as above them. A steamer was passing from one headland to another, but whether it was sailing the heavens to another planet, or was going to America, it was hard to say. There were no clouds. There was only a vague light which was both sea and sky. In the indeterminate west, when the sun would then have been setting, was a group of small islands of pearl, not marked on the chart, where no islands ought to have been seen. They were too lofty and softly luminous to be of this earth; they floated in a threatening cobalt darkness. The day was a discernible presence, but it was ghostly, and I wish I could guess its origin, and why it stood over us pale and silent, while we waited fearfully for a word that did not come.

## v

On the shore of the dunes, which are across the Estuary from Barra, few boats ever ground. There are shoals, and a conflict of tides and currents, and then the surf. And why should a boat put over? Nothing is there but the lighthouse and the sand. Nor is it easy to approach it from the habitable land to the east, for after a long and devious journey by ferry and road to avoid the arm of the sea, you come first to a difficulty of marsh and dyke, and then to the region of the dunes. That journey takes all the best of the daylight, for you could not hurry if you knew every yard of the way, which nobody does; and then, once caught in the brightness and silence of the desert of sandhills, the need to hurry is forgotten.

It is one of the days with a better light when your boat grounds on that shore. You may begin to walk the beach along the firm wet sand by the breakers, but you cannot keep to it. Something which calls, some strange lump among the flotsam stranded on the upper beach, draws you towards

the sandhills. It looked, you imagined, like a man asleep, with a dark blanket over him; but it proved to be only a short length of a ship's spar covered with bladder-wrack. There is no returning then. Once you reach that line of rubbish it is the track you follow, the message you try to read. A baffling story, though, made of words from many stories, separated, partly erased, muddled by the interruptions of storms, and woven irrelevantly into one long serpentine sentence which extends to the point where the shore goes round a corner; and from there, when you reach that point, continues to the next. It is made of shells, derelict trees, bushes which have drifted from shores only a botanist could guess, boards and fragments of wrecks, yarn and rope, bottles, feathers, carapaces of crabs and sea-urchins, and corks, all tangled with seaweed into an interminable cable. Sometimes it runs through the black ribs of an old wreck.

Perhaps, after the seaweed, there are more corks in its composition than anything else. The abundance of corks on this desert shore—they are to be found at the head of every miniaturecombe of the sandhills, most of them old and bleached, but some so fresh that it is easy to read the impress of the vintners on their seals—suggests that man's most marked characteristic is thirst. If one went by the evidence of this beach, then thirst is the chief human attribute. In this life we might be occupied most of the time in drinking from bottles. Examples of the bottles are here, too. The archaeologists of the future will find our enduring bottles and corks in association, and they will discover, by experiment, that the corks often fit the bottles, and they will deduce that both were used, in all probability, in conjunction. But for what reason? Nothing will have been left in the bottles for the archaeologists except dirt. We occasionally look on today while a learned man, from fragmentary evidence, creates a surprising picture of the past. I feel I should enjoy coming back, several thousand years hence, to hear another learned creature, a table before him covered with the shards and

corks of our years—one almost perfect example has the mysterious word *BOUL* cast on it—explain to his fascinated audience what he feels sure, from the relics before him, on which he has spent the best years of his life, the mysterious folk of our own age were like

We can be fairly sure not much evidence of our own age will remain by then. What will survive of us will be the oddest assortment of rubbish but the pertinacious corks will be there. The British Museum will have gone. It will be impossible to refer to the London Directory. No Burke will exist. All the files of the newspapers, with their lists of honours, will have perished. What will our age be called? Not the age of Invention, of the Great War, of Reconstruction, or anything else that is noble and inspiring, for not a vestige of a democratic press, an aeroplane, a motor-car, or a wireless set will remain. There will be only corks and bottles.

For the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy. Yet it does seem unfair that of all the proud memories of these resounding days nothing may persist but our corks and bottles. Another interruption of ice may creep down from the Pole, as has happened before, as indeed happened once to the undoing of a previous race of men. Its rigours increase, but so gradually that men are hardly aware that anything is happening. They say to each other at last, 'The summers seem very short.' The cheerful Press of that day, true to its function of maintaining the spirit of the people, never mentions winter, never speaks of the cold, but always turns its pages to the south, where most of the sun is.

Nevertheless, that does not thaw the ice. It still creeps south. The habit of a week-end at a cottage is presently forgotten. Unalienable rights and privileges become buried under inexorable glaciers that know nothing of our sounder economic arguments. And, in the end, maybe the ball of St Paul's is dropped as an erratic block from the bottom of an iceberg to form a fossil in the ooze of a southern sea,

to puzzle we may not guess what earnest investigator living in an ameliorated clime and time.

That ice retreats again, and the haunts and works of our age are exposed, as were those of Magdalenian man. And what have we been able to guess about him? Very little; but he did, we are sure, use implements having enduring parts of flint and bone. It is fairly certain that if he were aware that we judged him by his flints he would be a little grieved. And it would be too bad if the trifles which our butlers discarded with a flourish during our dinners were all that survived for the future to see of us. Why, that archæologist of a time to come may not even deduce that we employed butlers.

## VI

The rain had ceased, but the quay of Burra offered no other benefit. I was down there before dawn. Morning had not come, but I suppose the downpour had washed some of the dark out of the night, for all the quay was plain. It was not the quay I knew, but its wan spirit, and the vessels moored to it were ghosts, the faint hint of ships in a world that was not quite ready for them. There was no sound. There were only phantoms in a pallor. Perhaps it had ceased to rain because rain would be too substantial for an unembodied world. The irregular pools on the quay were not water, but openings to the antipodes. Rain would at once enlarge them till the quay dissolved and became as the Estuary, and as the sky, for both sea and sky were nothing.

I felt I ought not to be there. There was no telling whether I was too soon or too late, whether I was the first man or the last. I doubted that hush, and that dim appearance about me. When the air did stir, it was as if it were the breath of death, and the earth were the body of death. Then I made up my mind. It was no use going to sea as I had intended. I would go back to bed. At that moment there were footsteps, and the quay at once became solid. Two

black figures approached, the size of men. One of them put his foot into a great hole in the quay, and he did not vanish, but made a splash and an exclamation. That voice certainly was something I knew. The other man laughed quietly, the familiar satiric comment which comes of resignation to fate. We were all going to sea, as far as the western headland.

That cape is the western horn to the bay, Ptolemy mentions it. Nobody goes there except sailors who die, because they see the loom of it, or hear its warning, too late. The Foreland, to the people of Burra, is like the clouds. It is part of their own place, but it is unapproachable. At times it is missing. In some winds it will evaporate, though usually at sunset it shapes again, high, black, and austere, the end of the land to the west, and as distant and sombre as the world of the sagas. Is it likely, then, that one would ever think of a voyage to it? That cape, which one sees either because the light is at the right incidence, or because one is dreaming, might be no more than a thought turned backwards to the remote past, to Ultima Thule, where the sun never rises now, but where it is always evening twilight. It would have no trees. It would be an immensity of granitic crags, mossed and lichened, and the seas below it would be sounding doom, knowing that even the old gods are dead. It was not likely that we could credit such a voyage, yet the truth is we had assembled for it, and because of a promise made carelessly with an ancient mariner in a tavern on the previous afternoon. What on such a morning, and in such a place, was such a promise? As intangible as was our quay when I first saw it that morning, and no more matter than the Foreland itself, which is always distant, and then was gone. Yet here we were. We had met before dawn for that forty voyage, because of an indifferent word spoken yesterday and, bar, too, would have to be crossed. The bar! Besides, econ<sup>o</sup> were getting most unreasonably hungry, and so could St Pa<sup>o</sup>oke, and this induced the early morning temper, of an ice-vile, and would be worse than the early morning

courage but for the fact that that sort of courage is unknown in man, never rising to more than a bleak and miserable fortitude.

Charon hailed us from below the quay. He had with him a nondescript attendant. We embarked for his craft, which he said was anchored in midstream. We recognised him as our sailor of yesterday, though now there was something glum and ominous about him. He had no other word for us, but rowed steadily, and looked down his beard. His barque was like himself, when, still in resignation to what we had asked for, we boarded her. She was flush-decked, her freeboard was about eighteen inches, she had no bulwarks—to tell the truth, she was but a very barge, with that look of stricken poverty which is the sure mark of the usefulness of the merely industrious. She would float, I guessed, if not kept too long in seas that washed her imperfect hatch-covers. She would sail her distance, if the wind did not force her over till the water reached the rent in her deck. She could carry thirty tons of stone and, in fair weather, with reckless men, thirty-five tons. She had a freeboard, I repeat, of one foot six inches, now she was light, and peering through the interstices of her hatchboards I could see her keelson and note that though she did not leak like a basket she was doing her best. We were going to the Foreland to gather stones for the ballast of ships. Absurd and desperate enterprisel We could hear faint moaning, when attentive. That was the voice of the bar, three miles away.

The skipper and his man hoisted the mainsail, and we three manned the windlass, working in link by link a cable without end, till we were automata going up and down indifferent to both this life and the life to come. The barge gave a little leap as the anchor cleared.

The foresail was set. We drifted sideways round the hill. The silent houses, with white faces, looked at us one by one. We found a little wind, and the barge walked off past the lighthouse, which still was winking at us. There



came a weighty gust, the gear shook and banged, but held taut. Off she went.

Burra was behind us. Before us was a morose grey void. The bay apparently was only space, wordless yet, unlighted though in the neighbourhood of our barge we noticed there was the beginning of form in a dim and neutral universe. Long leaden mounds of water out of nowhere moved inwards past us, slow and heavy, lifting the barge and dropping her into hollows where her sails shook and spilled their draught. We three grasped stays, and peered outwards into the icy vacancy, wondering whether this was the free life, whether we were enjoying it, whether we wanted to go to the Foreland, and how long this would last. In the east there formed a low stratum of gold. Some of the leaden mounds were now burnished, or they glinted with precious ore. When the light broadened the air seemed to grow colder, as though day had sharpened the edge of the wind.

The hollow murmur from the bar increased to an intermittent plunging roar, and presently we fell into that noise. The smother stood the barge up, and stood her down, and drenched the mainsail to the peak. But it was only in play. We were worth nothing worse. We were allowed to go by, and one of us pumped the wash out of her, for the play had been somewhat rough.

In the easy swell of the bay our movements became rhythmic, and we settled down quietly in a long reach. A vault of blue had shaped over us. The Foreland was born into the world. It looked towards the new day, and was of amber. But over the moors to the north-east the rain-clouds, a gathering of sullen battalions, challenged the dawn with an entrenched region of gloom. Yet when the sun rose and looked straight at them, they went. It was a good morning. Now we could see all the bay coloured and defined in every hanging field, steep, and combe. The waters danced. The head of the skipper appeared at the scuttle—only one at a time could get into our cabin—and he had a large communal basin of *tra*, and a loaf speared on a long knife.

The Foreland, to which for hours our work seemed to bring us no nearer, which had been mocking the efforts to approach it of an obstinate little ship with a crew too stupid to realise that efforts to reach an enchanted coast were futile, suddenly relented. It grew higher and tangible. At last we felt that it was drawing us, rather too intimately, towards its overshadowing eminence. The nearer it got, the greater grew my surprise that in a time long past man had found the heart to put off in a galley, to leave what he knew, and to stand in to an unknown shore, if it offered no more than our cape. The apparition of the Foreland was as chill as the shadow in the soul of man. It appeared to have some affinity with that shadow. Though monstrous and towering, it seemed buoyant and without gravity, an image of original and unrelenting doubt. Above our mast, when I looked up, landslides were impending, arrested in collapse. But I thought they were quivering, as though the arrest were momentary. That vast mass seemed based on thunderous rumblings and hollow shadows. Our craft still moved in, projected forward on vehement billows, past black jags in blusters of foam, and then anchored, with calamity suspended above. Our ship heaved and fell on submarine displacements. The skipper and his man went below.

When they reappeared they were naked. It was a good and even necessary hint. We got into the boat, and pulled towards a beach which was a narrow shelf at the base of a drenched wall. The rocks which flanked that little beach were festooned with weeds, and sea growths hung like curtains before the night of caves. Somehow there the water was stilled, and all but one of us leaped into it. One man remained in the boat.

The ocean outside was exploding on steeples and tables of rock. It formed domes, green and shining, over submerged crags. The foam had the brilliance of a legendary light. The shore looked timeless, but it smelt young. The sea was the one that gave Ulysses his bearings.

**SOME HINTS  
FOR THOSE ABOUT TO TRAVEL  
1923**

## SOME HINTS FOR THOSE ABOUT TO TRAVEL

### I

SOON after the guns fell quiet a book came out called *The Happy Traveller*. It is not an indispensable work if you have booked your passage, or are on a ship's articles, for only Providence can help you then, but it is a cheerful guide if you would know what long journeys are like, in parts, without making them. Its author, the Rev. Frank Tatchell, proves he has seen enough of the world to satisfy a crew of able seamen. He has seen it from the by-roads, the high-roads, the decks of local coasting ships, and the windows of third-class railway carriages. He has seen it because, apparently, he wanted to; and he has enjoyed it all, or most of it. He has some heroic advice for those who may be infected by his own enthusiasm, and indeed his book would induce many young men to pull on their boots forthwith "Be cheerful and interested in everything," he tells us; and, "Do not bother too much about your inside."

But what I sought in his volume was not the Malay for Thank you, which he gave me, but what set him going. Why did he do it? There is a word frequently seen in lush narrative, "wanderlust." The very lemmings must know it. It excuses almost anything in the way of travel lunacy, even to herding with Russian emigrants for fun. It is used as a flourish by those who hope we shall fail to notice that they are uncertain what to do with themselves. Mr. Tatchell, however, does not use it once. Yet you see him hustling through the bazaar at Bhamo, where you do not meet many tourists; and he discovers that the half-castes of the Society Isles are especially charming, though he does not pretend it is worth while voyaging to Polynesia to see

them, or he peeps into the Malayan forest long enough to note myriads of leeches in all directions humping and hastening towards the traveller. He certainly saw those leeches. He saw them *hump*. But why was he there? For out of so varied an experience he returns but to assure romantic youth sitting on the bollards of our quays and gazing seaward wistfully, "Elephants dislike having white men approach them from behind. Or of this: "If you should become infested with fleas, sleep out in a bed of bracken one night and in the morning you will be free from the pests. Such fruits of travel seem hardly enough. Mr. Tatchell himself was decidedly a happy traveller, and the cause of happiness in others—his book can be commended in confidence—for he admits that his method of enjoying himself in a strange bed is to sing aloud the aria, "Why do the Nations?" But he does not tell us what sent him roving nor does he exhibit a collection of treasures, except oddities such as the warning to white men about approaching the behinds of elephants, and Vinakka vinakka! (Fijian for Bravo)

But what else was there to get? It would be difficult for most voyagers to explain convincingly why they became restless and went to sea. Some do it to get away from us, some to get away from themselves and some because they cannot help it. I shall not forget the folly which gave me my first sight of Africa. The office telephone bell rang.

Oh, is that you? Well, we want you to go to Algeria at once. I went downstairs hurriedly to disperse this editorial absurdity. But it was no good. I had to go. And because I was argumentative about it they added Tripoli and Sicily, which seemed me right. After all, while in Africa one is necessarily from Fleet Street. I should have remembered that

Tatchell tell us that even a poor man, if he does not he is in bondage to the income tax collector or officials, may see all the world. I suppose he sufficient health, enterprise, and impudence a could inveigle himself overseas without

paying a lot of money to the P. & O. Company; though it is not easy, nowadays, to dodge the restrictions of the Mercantile Marine Board and the seafarers' unions. Ship-owners do not lightly engage to pay compensation for accidents to inexperienced hands whose sole recommendation is that they want to see the world so wide. As for getting a berth for a voyage cheaply, it would be foolish to suppose that agents for passenger ships are willing to forgive the fact that you are short of cash. You have to pay across the counter in exchange for a ticket, and at the post-war rates. *If anyone doubts that this is a hard world, let him cut the painter at Port Said with a shilling in his pocket, and note what will happen.* In some difficult regions you must travel on foot with the natives, and live with them; and that costs very little, even in a land otherwise expensive, but those unsophisticated coasts must first be reached. That simple way of the nomad is all very well in the wilderness, but I think a reasonable man, however thirsty he may be for a draught of primitive life, would hesitate before sequestering himself in native cities like Calcutta and Singapore, counting cannily the lesser coins, and travelling about in third-class carriages. I noticed that even Mr. Tatchell shrank from the prospect of getting from island to island of Indonesia with the deck passengers, and I was not surprised. One is easily satisfied with an occasional hour on the lower deck, in converse with a picturesque native elder. But to eat and sleep there for weeks among the crowing cocks, the banana skins, the babies, the dried fish, the men and women spitting red stuff after chewing betel-nut! It has been done, I believe, but the shipping companies and all their officers set their faces against it. They do not encourage Europeans to travel even second class in those seas, though there is hardly any difference between the cabins of the two classes. Of course, if one were anything of an Orientalist, it would be ridiculous to keep to the first saloon with the Europeans when there are Arab and Chinese merchants in an inferior saloon of the ship.

I do not know how one plans a long voyage and maintains the excellent plan scientifically through all its difficulties. I have never planned. A ship seems to have drifted my way at last, and then, if I did not hesitate too long about it, I boarded her, though never with an adequate reason. One bitter and northerly Easter I read, because gardening was impossible, Bates's *Naturalist on the Amazons*. The famous illustration of that spectacled entomologist in trousers and a check shirt standing with a butterfly net in a tropical forest, surrounded by infuriated toucans, fixed me after I had idly pulled the volume off a library shelf. The book had never been commended to me, but its effect was instant. And the picture that artful naturalist drew of the pleasures of Para, when contrasted with the sleet of an English spring, made me pensive over a fire. I should never see the tropics. And what a name it is, the Amazons! And what a charming book is Bates's!

I did inquire into this enticement, but Para might as well have been in another star. One may go cheaply to Canada, and risk it. That trick cannot be played on the tropics with impunity. I had the propriety to guess that. Then, one night, a sailor came home from sea, and just before he left me he spoke of his next voyage. They were going to Para, and up the Amazon, and up a tributary of that river never before navigated by an ocean going steamer. "Nonsense," I said, it cannot be done—not if you draw, as you say you do, nearly twenty four feet and it means rising about 600 feet above sea level.

You can talk, the sailor replied, "but I've seen the charter. We're going, and I wish we weren't. Sure to be fevers. Besides, a ship has no right inside a continent."

I began thinking of Bates. My friend turned up the collar of his coat before going into the rain. "Look here," he said, "if you don't believe me, you may take the trip. There's a cabin we don't use."

I never gave that preposterous suggestion a second thought, but I did write, for a lively morning newspaper,

my sailor's mocking summary of what that strange voyage might have in store. The editor, a day later, met me on the office stairs. "That was an amusing lie of yours this morning," he said. I answered him that it was written solely in the cause of science and navigation; and what was more, I assured him earnestly, I had been offered a berth in the ship for the proof of doubters. "Well," said the editor, "you shall go and prove it." He meant that. I could see by the look in his eye that nothing much was left about which to argue. He prided himself on his swift and unreasonable decisions.

Somehow, as that editor descended the stairs, showing me the finality of his back, the attractive old naturalist of the Amazon with his palms at Para, toucans, spectacles, butterflies, and everlasting afternoon of tranquillity in the forest of the tropics, was the less alluring. This meant packing up; and for what? Even the master of the steamer could not tell me that.

It is better to obey the mysterious direction, without any fuss, when it points a new road, however strange that road may be. There is probably as much reason for it, if the truth were known, as for anything else. It would be absurd, in the manner of Browning and Mr. Tatchell, to greet the unseen with a cheer, and thus flatter it; yet when affairs begin to look as though they intend something different for us, perhaps the proper thing to do is to get into accord with them to see what will happen.

There was no doubt about that voyage either. It is worth the break, and the discomfort of a winter dock, and the drive out in the face of hard westerly weather, to come up a ship's companion one morning and to see for the first time the glow of sunrise above the palisade of a forest of the equatorial rains. You never forget the warm smell of it, and its light; though that simple wonder might not be thought worth a hard fight with gales in the western ocean. Yet later, when by every reasonable estimate of a visitor accustomed to the assumption of man's control of nature



the forest should have ended, yet continues as though it were eternal—savage, flamboyant, yet silent and desolate—the voyager begins to feel vaguely uneasy. He cannot meet that lofty and sombre regard with the cheerful curiosity of the early part of the voyage. He feels lost. St Paul's Cathedral does not seem as influential as once it did, nor man so important. And perhaps it is not an unhealthy surmise, either, that man may be only a slightly disturbing episode on earth after all, and had better look out, a humbling and humbling notion of that sort would have done him no harm, if of late years it had given him pause.

Well something of that sort is about as much as one should expect to get out of the experience, that and the ability to call for a porter in Fijian or Chinese. But is it not sufficient? It is hardly as tangible as hearing earlier than the people at home of the wealth of oil at Balikpapan, or what comes of getting in at the Rand on the ground floor. Even as book material it is not so sparkling as Lady Hester Stanhope, nor as exciting as sword-fish angling off the Bermudas. Nor does it provide the inspiration, once you are home again, to get to work to plant the British flag where it will do the lucky ones most good. There seems hardly anything in it, and yet you feel that you could not have done any better, and are not sorry it turned out just so.

Besides, there were the men one met. It would not be easy to analyse the impulse which sent one travelling, an impulse strong enough, if vague, to overcome one's natural desire to be let alone. What did one want, or expect to learn? It would be hard to say. But you are aware, at rare moments, that you found something almost as good as a word about a new oil-field through some chance converse with a stranger about nothing in particular. For it might have been night in the Malacca Strait, with little to give reasonable conviction of the realities except the stars, the tremor of the ship's rail, and the glow of a shipmate's cigar, and the other man might not have said much. You had previously noticed that he was not that kind. But his casual

relation of an obscure adventure—rather as if the droning of the waters had become a significant utterance—gave an abiding content to the shadows.

## II

What right have we to travel, when better men have to stay indoors? But it would be unwise to attempt an answer to that question, for certainly it would lead, as did the uncorking of the bottle that imprisoned the Genie, to much smoke and confusion. We should not poke about with a naked light amid the props which uphold the august and many-storied edifice of Society, even to make sure of our rightful place there. It was a reading of Lord Bryce's *Memories of Travel* that started so odd a doubt in my mind. When I had finished it I did not begin to think of packing a bag. I felt instead that I had no right to do that. Lord Bryce, that learned man, had been remembering casually Iceland and the tropics, Poland, the Mountains of Moab, and the scenery of North America. But he did not make me feel that those places should be mine. He made them desirable yet infinitely remote, reservations for wiser men, among whom, if I were bold enough to intrude, my inconsequence would be detected instantly. After reading his book of travel I felt that it would be as wrong of me to possess and privily treasure priceless Oriental manuscripts as to claim the right to see coral atolls in the Pacific or prospects of the Altai.

We may lack the warrant to travel even if we have the means. Lord Bryce made it coldly clear that few of us are competent to venture abroad. He made me feel that much that would come my way would be wasted, for I have little in common with the encyclopædias. The wonders would loom ahead, would draw abeam, would pass astern, and I should not see them; they would not be there. The pleasures of travel, when we are candid about them, are separated by very wide deserts and tedious, where there is nothing but sand and the dreary howling of wild dogs. An Eastern

city may grow stale in a night "'Dear City of Cecrops,' saith the poet, but shall we not say, 'Dear City of Zeus'?" There are days when the ocean is a pond, its relative importance then appears to be that of a newspaper of last week. Sometimes, too, you do not want to hear that there are three miles of water under you, no less. What of it? In nasty weather the end of the last two miles so far below you is of less importance than the beginning of the first.

It may also happen that when at last your ship reaches that far place whose name is as troubling as the name of the star to which you look in solitude, that—what is it you do there? You gaze overside at it from your trite anchorage, unbelievably. The first mate comes aft, leisurely, rubbing his hands. You do not go ashore. What has become of the magic of a name? You go below with the mate, who has finished his job, for a pipe. To-morrow will do for Paradise, or the day after. One morning I reached Naples by sea, and I well remember my first sight of it. The stories I had heard of that wonderful bay! The ecstatic letters in my pocket from those who were advising me that nothing of my luck should be missed! But it was raining. It was cold. I had been travelling for an age. There was hardly any bay, and what I could see of it was as glum as a bad mistake. There were a wet quay, some house-fronts that were house-fronts, and a few cabs. I took a cab. That was better than walking to the railway station, and quicker. I can describe my first sight of Naples and its bay quite easily.

But Lord Bryce was not an incompetent traveller. He could see through any amount of rain and dirt. He was competent indeed, fully, lightly, and with grace. To other tourists he may have appeared to be one of the crowd, trying hard to get some enjoyment out of a lucky deal in rubber or real estate, and not knowing how to do it. But he was not bored. He was quiet merely because he knew what he was looking at. What to us would have been opaque he could see through, yet I doubt whether he would have said anything about it, unless he had been asked. And

why should we ask a fellow traveller whether he can see through what to us does not exist?

Yet how much we miss, when on a journey, Lord Bryce reveals. There was not often a language difficulty for him. When he looked at the wilderness of central Iceland he knew the cause of it, and could explain why tuffs and basalts make different landscapes. When he was in Hungary and Poland the problems we should have brushed aside as matters no Englishman ought to be expected to understand became, in the light of his political and historical lore, simple and relevant. Among the islands of the South Seas, with their unsolved puzzles of an old continental land mass and of race migrations, so learned a traveller was just as much at ease. Once I remarked to an old voyager, who in some ways resembled Lord Bryce, that it was a dream of mine to visit Celebes. "But," he remarked coldly, "you are not an ethnologist." No; and I can see now, after these *Memories of Travel*, that I have other defects as a traveller.

Yet I cannot deny that a craving for knowledge, when abroad, may sometimes come over me, with a dim resemblance to the craving for food or sleep. But if I go to my note-books in later years, and discover that though I had forgotten them I had many interesting facts stored away, nevertheless it is evident the valuable information does very well where it is. It will never be missed. Its importance has passed. There are other things, however, one never entered in a note-book, and never tried to remember, for they were of no seeming importance then or now—things seen for an instant only, or smelt, or heard in the distance, which are never forgotten. They will recur from the past, often irrelevantly, even when the memory is not turned that way, as though something in us knew better what to look for in life than our curious eyes.

### III

Travel, we are often told, gives light to the mind. I have wondered whether it does. Consider the sailors. They

are supposed to travel widely. They see the cities of the world, and the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. And—well, do you know a few sailors? If you do, then you may have noticed that not infrequently their opinions seem hardly more valuable than yours or mine. Yet it must be said for them that they rarely claim an additional value for their opinions because they have anchored off Colombo. They know better than that. They know, very likely, that all the cities of the world can no more give us what was withheld at our birth than our unaided suburb. As much convincing folly may be heard at Penang as at Peckham. The sad truth is, one is as certain to grow wiser during a week-end at Brighton as in a 'black Bilbao tramp—

With her load line over her hatch, dear lass,  
And a drunken Dago crew,  
And her nose held down on the old trail, our  
own trail the out trail  
From Cadiz, south on the Long Trail—the  
trail that is always new

The fascination and the illusion of that Out Trail! The other day, a man, a wise and experienced traveller, who knows deep water better than most of us, who has hunted whales, and even enjoyed being out of soundings in literature, overheard a voice near us on a dock-head exclaim in delight at the sight of a ship outward bound 'I wish I were aboard her. He said to me quietly, "I felt like that too, but really, you know, I don't want to be aboard. I'm a little bit afraid of the sea."

So am I. That is one thing, at least, I have learned in travel. I do not love the sea. The look of it is disquieting. There is something in the very sound of it that stirs the premonition felt while we listen to noble music, we become inexplicably troubled. It is not the fear of mishap, though that may not be absent. It is more than that, for after all one is much safer in a good ship than when crossing the road at Charing Cross.

It may be a surmise of one's inconsequence in that immensity of sky and water. And our inconsequence has not been always obvious to us. The ministrations of a city nourish the pride of the social animal and yet make him a dependable creature. Turn him into the open and he shrinks from all that light. The dread problems that our energetic fellow-men create in the cities of the plains make us myopic through the intensity of our peering alarm. We become sure that even the empyrean must watch our activities with grave interest. We may be deceived in that; for on blue water one cannot help noting that the sky does not appear to act with any regard for our interest, and the sea itself is inscrutable, and so vast, and moves with a rhythm that so diminishes one's own scope and measure, that a voyager may imagine he is confronted by majesty, though an impersonal majesty, without ears or eyes or ruth. That does not comfort a sense of self-importance.

Do we travel to learn such things? Of course not. The promise to diminish a feeling of pride is not one of Messrs. Cook's happy inducements. We do not travel for that. If we get it at all we are welcome to it, without extra charge. You must pay more if you want to have a cabin to yourself. There are additional charges, too, if you would deviate from the schedule of your voyage. Should you put off at Penang for a week, and continue by the next ship, that fun must be paid for. Eager still for the end of the rainbow—which, so far on a long voyage, you have not reached, to your surprise and disappointment—you leave your ship at Barbados, consult the chart, and judge that what you really want is at Curaçao, at Surinam, at Trinidad, or some other place where you are not; and at a great expense of time and money you go. No use. There again you find that you have taken yourself with you. No rainbow's end!

I have often wondered what people see who travel round the world in a liner furnished with the borrowings of a city's club-life and other occasions for idling; Panama, San Francisco, Honolulu, Yokohama, Hong Kong, Batavia,

and Rangoon, all those variations of scenery for the club windows, and so home again. What do they see? The anchorage at Sourabaya is no more revealing than that of Le Havre, if warmer: a mole, ships at rest, some straight miles of ferro-concrete quays in the distance, flat grey acres of the galvanised roofs of sheds, and a tower or two beyond. True, there are the clouds of the tropics to watch, and a Malay polishing the ship's brass. Only the mate and the captain are at lunch, for the others have gone ashore. You may make what romance you can out of that.

The others have gone ashore? All the great seaports I have seen have been very much alike, and these liners rarely stay at one long enough to make easy the discovery of the difference. You have no time to get lost. You arrive, and then an unyielding notice is chalked on the blackboard at the head of the ship's gangway, to which a quartermaster draws your attention as you leave the ship. The old city is two miles away, and the ship sails in two hours. No chance, you see, to get comfortably mislaid and forgotten. Besides, you run off with a car-load of other passengers. Unless the car skids into a ditch the game is up.

Well, after all, that grudging sense of disappointment comes of intemperance with fascinating place-names and illusions. We expect to have romance displayed for us, as though it were a greater Wembley, and it is not Travellers who "dash round the world, as the febrile interviewers tell us, who dash across the Sahara or the Atlantic, then get into other speedy engines and dash again, expectant of a full life and their money's worth, might as well dash to Southend and back till they run over a dog, or dash their brains out, and thus fulfil their destiny. But I am not decrying travel, though sailors, I have been made painfully aware, can be amused by the expectations of those to whom a ship is an interlude of variegated enchantment between the serious affairs of life. I enjoy travel, and a little of it now and then is good for us, if we do not make demands which only luck, chance may fulfil.

The best things in travel are all undesigned, and perhaps even undeserved. I had never seen a whale, for instance, and recently I was watching the very waters of the Java Sea where one of them might have been good enough to reward me. Nothing like a whale appeared. Too late for that sort of thing, perhaps. This is the day of the submarine. Or perhaps I stared from the ship listlessly, and with no faith, not caring much whether there were whales and wonders in these days or not. Anyhow, my last chance went. On my way home, while just to the south of Finisterre, I came out of my cabin a little after sunrise merely to look at the weather (which was fine), and a tiny cloud, rounded and defined, was dispersing over the waves, less than a mile away. Shrapnelling? Then a number of those faint rounded clouds of vapour shaped intermittently. The ship was in the midst of a school of whales. There was a sigh—like the exhaust of a locomotive—and a body which seemed to rival the steamer in bulk appeared alongside; we barely missed that shadow of a submerged island. The officer of the watch told me afterwards that the ship's stern nearly ran over it.

That was a bare incident, however, and perhaps not worth counting. Yet all the significant things in travel come that way. Once in a heavy weather I saw a derelict sailing-ship; our steamer left its course to inspect her. But she was dead. There was no movement aboard her, except the loose door of a deckhouse. It flung open as we drew near, but nobody came out. The seas ran as they pleased about her deck fixtures. It was sunset, and just when we thought she had gone, for she had slipped over the summit of an upheaval, her skeleton appeared again in that waste, far astern, against the bleak western light. I felt in that moment that only then had the sea shown itself to me.

Light comes to us unexpectedly and obliquely. Perhaps it amuses the gods to try us. They want to see whether we are asleep. If we are watchful we may get a bewildering hint, but placed where nobody would have expected



to find it. We may spend the rest of the voyage wondering what that meant. A casual coast suddenly fixed by so strange a glow that one looks to the opposite sky fearfully, a careless word which makes you glance at a stranger, and doubt your fixed opinion, an ugly city, which you are glad to leave, transfigured and jubilant as you pass out of its harbour, these are the incidents that give a sense of discovery to a voyage. We are on more than one voyage at a time. We never know where *Manoa* may be. There are no fixed bearings for the City of Gold.

## IV

The reader of travellers' tales is a cautious fellow, not easily fooled. He is never misled by facts which do not assort with his knowledge. But he does love wonders. His faith in dragons, dog-headed men, bearded women, and mermaids is not what it used to be, but he will accept good substitutes. The market is still open to the ingenious. Any lady who is careful to announce her return from the *sheikhs* is sure to have the interviewers surprise her at her hotel, her publisher will see to that. She need only come back from Borneo, by the normal liner, and whisper "head-hunters" to the ever-ready note-books, and if she displays a *parang* which some Dyak never used except for agricultural purposes that will be enough to rouse surprise at her daring.

But what are facts? There are limits, as we know, to the credulity of our fellows, as once Mr Darwin, who considered exact evidence so important, discovered with a shock. What we really want is evidence we can understand, like that most discreet and wary old critic, the aunt of the young sailor. She quizzed him humorously about his flying fish, but was serious at once over that chariot wheel which was brought up on a fluke of his ship's anchor in the Red Sea. She knew well enough where it was Pharaoh got what he asked for. Give us evidence in accord with our habits of thought, and we know where we are.

Even I have discovered that there are readers of travellers' tales who decline anything to which there is no reference in *Whitaker's Almanack*. A very prudent attitude of mind. I cannot find fault with it because it does not accept mermaids from us, but I do suggest there may be things in the world which have not yet come under Mr. Whitaker's eye. A little scepticism preserves the soul, though infertility would result if the soul were encased in it; which it rarely is, for luckily sceptics only disbelieve what is foreign to them, and accept in unquestioning faith whatever accords with their philosophy. It is true that more scepticism in the past might have saved us from many dragons and visiting angels, which in its absence spawned and flourished with impunity. On the other hand, it would have shut out Mount Zion for ever. It must be said, too, that the good readers who repudiate with blighting amusement those narratives of travel which do not accord with Mr. Whitaker's valuable index, will yet take, and with their eyes shut, much that compels seasoned travellers to smile bitterly.

If you refer to Mr. Whitaker for the Spice Islands, or the Moluccas, for instance, you will fail to find concerning them one little fact; it is not advertised by Mr. Whitaker; not important enough, perhaps. I should never have known it myself, only I was there once. I am not at all sure the fact is so insignificant that it should pass without notice, so I will record it here. At Ternate, an island which has been forgotten since white men ceased to murder each other for its cloves, it is easy to believe that you have really escaped from the world. Great gulfs of space and light separate you at Ternate from all the agitations by which civilised communities know that they are the buds, full of growing pains, on the tree of life. They are excellent gulfs of light. There are no agitations. Even the typhoons which herald the changes of the seasons, and not so far away, leave Ternate alone. Its volcano—the volcano is all the island—may blow up some day; but we should not expect earthly felicity to shine tranquilly for ever. Therefore while

it persists it is delightful to walk the strands and by-paths of that oceanic garden of the tropics, and to feel the mind, so recently numbed by the uproar caused in the building of the Perfect State, revive in quietude. One day, on Ternate, I passed through the shade of a nutmeg grove, and came upon a lane at the back of the village. I could smell vanilla, and looked about for that orchid, and presently found it growing against a sugar palm. Behind that odorous shrubbery was a native house, and beyond the house, and far below it, the blue of the sea. Nobody was about. It was noon. It was hot. The high peak of Tidore across the water had athwart its cone a cloud which was as bright as an impaled moon. I saw no reason why this earth should not be a good place for us, and, thanking my fortune, idled along that lane till I saw another house, set back among hibiscus. It was a Malay home, but larger and better than is usual, for it had more timber in it. Along the front of the verandah was a board with a legend in Malay, 'The Communist Party of India.' This confused me, so I strolled in to look closer, and saw, hanging within the verandah, portraits of Lenin, Trotsky, and Itadek, there were others, though I was not Communist enough to recognise them, but there they were in my lonely tropical garden, isolated by those gulfs of light and space from Moscow. The Dutch Resident, on hearing later of my extraordinary discovery, merely shot out his lower lip and spread his hands. Why, yes, those little meeting-houses were all over the East Indies. Such places, as well as the cinematograph.

When we are gazing about us in a strange land it is not easy to distinguish what is of importance from what is of no account. You can never tell whether the words of deepest significance are whispered at Government House or in some low haunt near the docks. Time will show. In any case, even if you feel sure you have been vouchsafed a peep into the Book of Doom, and saw in the veritable script of an archangel what you are at once anxious to announce to your fellows for their good, you may save yourself the

trouble. If it is not already known, nobody will bother. There is precious little information of importance in the newspapers that has not been long matured in the wood. It is already as old as sin before the man in the street, poor fellow, gapes at it as news.

It is possible that hunters of big game, while tracking lions, may miss much that is commonplace but the truth, though naturally their thrilling adventures attract us more than would a relation of what usually happens. It would never do to disclose plain daylight, and show that one can be as desolate in the sameness of Borneo as in Islington. I know of one intrepid sojourner on far beaches, a novelist who fascinates a multitude of readers with livid and staccato fiction in which figure island princesses whose breasts are dangerous with hidden daggers. Head-hunters and dissolute whites move there in a darkness which means Winchester, but no sleep; even the intense beauty of those beaches is so like evil that only reckless men may face it. Yet in reality those islands are as placid as though laved by the waters of the Serpentine. A migration of readers from a London suburb to their shores would make the lovely but tigerish princesses show for what they are—no more dangerous than the young ladies peeling the potatoes at Cadby Hall. Indeed, their bold chronicler, who stimulates feverish longing in the dreary lassitude of England's wage-earners with a violent drug distilled from the beach refuse of that distant archipelago, does most of his work in the bed of a rest-house, which is never approached by a danger worse than a falling coconut.

It seems possible for a romantic writer, if he is cynical enough, and if he injects his stimulant with a syringe of about the measure of a foot-pump, to have a nice success with those who suffer from the speed and distraction of our homeland; for though the sufferers will take any stimulant, yet their nerves respond to very little that is not as coarse as a weed-killer. This should not be regretted. It would be dismal, indeed, if they were completely insensitive. The

high speed of our weeks driven by machinery, the clangour of engines, crime, and politics, the fear which never leaves the poor victims, for they have been parted from the quiet earth which gives shelter and food, have depraved their bodies and starved their natural appetites. It is a wonder that they feel anything, or care for anything. They are left with but a vague yearning for some life, for any life different from their own but they are so far gone that they cannot conceive that it might be a life of peace and good will. Their very sunrise must be bloody, like their familiar news, or they would not know it for the dayspring yet the full measure of their fall from grace, which only an alienist could rightly gauge, is that they are not satisfied with a dusky bosom unless it conceals a knife.

But when you are out in those barbarous lands, you find that princesses unluckily, are even less noticeable than the leopards, and when seen are less beautiful. They do not wear knives in their bosoms, for the same reason that other charmers dispense with them. Indeed, there is no end to the difference between what you have been led to expect in a place and what is there. Compare the reality of a tropical forest with its popular picture. That popular notion of it did not grow in the tropics, but in the pages of imaginative fiction and poetry. Truth may be stranger than fiction, but it is not so easy to read. One may see more orchids in Kew Gardens in a day than in a year of the tropical woods. If the Garden of Eden had been anything like the Amazon jungle, then our first parents would never have been evicted; they would have moved fairly soon on their own account, without giving notice. A few coloured snakes, on some days, would break the brooding monotony of that forest, but they are too shy to comfort us. The animals of these equatorial fastnesses seldom show themselves. When they do, it is done inadvertently, and they are off at once. If you meet a tiger when on a ramble by daylight, you may consider yourself lucky if his sudden departure gives you two seconds of him before he is gone for ever. After dark, of course,

you would take care that he could not meet you alone, for that place is not yours after sunset, and he knows it.

Tigers, snakes, lovely but malignant nymphs, and head-hunters are not the dangers. What kills men in the wilderness is anxiety, undernourishment, and mosquitoes. The mosquito, the little carrier of malaria, is a more exacting enemy of the adventurer than the harpies and dragons of the fairy tales ever were to knights-errant. He is worse than all the cannibal tribes. Head-hunters, it must be confessed, are far better for conveying liveliness to the pages of a travel book, if it is to be worth the great price usually charged for it. Naturally a reader wants his money's worth. A mosquito will not go far, if you are an author, and are writing high romance. When, however, you are dealing personally with the realities of the Congo, you will discover a tendency to feel more concern over the small flies which carry fevers and sleeping sickness than for all the lions and cannibals in Africa. A statue of St. George killing a mosquito instead of a dragon would look ridiculous, but it was lucky for the saint he had only a dragon to overcome.

Now the travellers who accompany cinema operators to the outer dangers are always careful to explain to interviewers, because publicity can never be extravagant, the perils of human flesh-pots, poisoned arrows, giant reptiles, and the other theatrical properties which are recognised instantly by everybody with the requisite awe. On the other hand, we learn from the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine that the young men who go to Africa to hunt down the trypanosome of sleeping sickness venture out unannounced, though they have spent years, and not weeks, in preparing themselves for their perilous quest. They go unannounced, are granted but £100 a year as a reward, and return—if they have that luck—less recognisable than the firemen of their ships; for the very firemen, as we know, have been the subject of happy verse. Yet compared with the skill, enterprise, and courage needed for the hunting of that trypanosome, the killing of lions is no more than the

and habits of rich people, and the rules and regulations of many committees of exacting experts, must be a symbol which still suggests to men in bondage an undiscovered golden shore, or fleece, of which they will continue to dream, as they dream irrationally of peace while never ceasing to fashion war.

So long as men who must stay ashore are thrilled when they see a liner going out, or do no more on a half-holiday than loaf about the docks and speculate around the queer foreign names and ports of registry that show on steamers' counters, or sit on a beach and throw stones into the water, we may still hope to change the ugly look of things. There is precious little hope to be got out of whatever keeps us industrious, but there is a chance for us whenever we cease work and become star-gazers.

Stuck on a bastion of the morning railway station, where we cannot miss it though usually we have not the time to stop and look at it, is a large poster inviting us to See the Midnight Sun. It shows a liner, and she is heading towards an Arctic glory as bright as any boy's dream of great achievement. But it is not stuck there for boys to look at, though they do. It is meant for those who have been so practical and level-headed in a longish life that they can afford a yachting cruise to the Arctic circle. Doubtless, therefore, they make those cruises. I can account for that poster in no other way. It is one of the strangest and most significant facts in industrial society. All very well for some of us to read—wasting time as wantonly as if we had a dozen lives to play with—every volume on Arctic travel we can reach, knowing, as we read, that we shall do no more than cross the Pentland Firth, if that.

But that station poster is addressed to those who are supposed never to dream, for they have attained to Thread-needle Street. What do they want with the Midnight Sun? Haven't they got the *Morning Post*? But there you are. Even now they feel they have missed something, and whatever it is they will go to the Arctic to look for it. Cannot

they find it in Threadneedle Street? Apparently not. That poster on a suburban station, though I cannot afford to miss the train to examine it for useful details, is like a faint promising hail from a time not yet come. Man is still in his early youth. He may come back from an Arctic holiday some day, or a recreation in China, push over Threadneedle Street with a laugh, and begin anew.

Men of letters who gaze longingly after departing ships, and men of business who are in those ships without the excuse of business, are proof enough that their many inventions, so far, have not got them what they wanted. For London is not quite the loveliness we meant to make, and we know it. The ruthless and worrying place dismays us. In our repulsion from it we say it ought to be called Dementia, and invent golf and the week-end cottage to revive the soul it deadens without recompense. All to no purpose. There is nothing for it but to destroy London and rebuild it nearer to the heart's desire, or else to escape from it, if we can, though no guarding dragon of a grim prison-house was ever such a sleepless, cunning, and ugly-tempered brute as the machine we have made with our own hands. No wonder it pays to decorate the walls of the capital with romantic but seditious pictures of palms, midnight suns, coasts of illusion, and ships outward bound. Nothing could so plainly indicate our revolt from the affairs we must somehow pretend to venerate.

It is not the sea itself, not all that salt water, which we find attractive. Most of us, I suppose, are a little nervous of the sea. No matter what its smiles may be, we doubt its friendliness. It is about as friendly as the volcano which is benign while it does not feel like blowing up. What draws us to the sea is the light over it. Try listening, in perfect safety, to combers breaking among the reefs on a dark night, and then say whether you enjoy the voice of great waters. I think it must be the wonder of light without bounds which draws us to the docks to overcome the distractions and discomforts of departure. We see there is liberty



in the world, after all, if only we had the will to take it. And unfailingly we make strange landfalls during an escape, coasts of illusion if you like, and under incredible skies, but sufficient to shake our old faith in those realities we had supposed we were obliged to accept. There are other worlds.

## VI

My journeys have all been the fault of books, though Lamb would never have called them that. They were volumes which were a substitute for literature when the season was dry. A reader once complained to me, and with justice, that as a literary commentator I betrayed no pure literary predilections. "You never devote your page," he said fretfully, "to the influence of the Pleiades. You never refer to eighteenth-century literature. You never look back on the names familiar to all who read Latin. What is interesting to truly curious and bookish people might not exist for you. I wonder, for example, if Nahum Tate were mentioned in a conversation, whether you would be able to say what it meant?"

Well, not exactly that. I fear my readiness for the challenge would not pass the test. All that would happen to me would be a recollection of white walls, bright but severe, on which are scattered black memorial tablets, one of them with a ship over it carved in alabaster; an interior of a church as cool and quiet as a mausoleum. There are shadows moving on the luminous white; June trees are murmuring outside. There is a smell of clothes preserved till Sunday in camphor-wood and sandal-wood boxes. A big venerable man is perched high in a rich and glowing mahogany box, whose lifted chin, jutting saliently from white sideboard whiskers, has a dent in its centre; he is talking, with his eyes shut, to one he calls Gard, and I listen to him with deep interest, for once that old man served with John Company, which to a minor figure in his congregation seems miraculous. Then we all stand, and sing the words of a poet strangely named Tate and Brady. Would anyone wish me to quote the

words, in proof? Certainly not. There is no need. When we come out of that building there is a stone awry on the grass by the door, commemorating one who was a "Master Mariner, of Plymouth," and a verse can be just deciphered on it, which reads

Thou, as a gallant bark from Albion's coast,  
The storms all weathered and the ocean crost,  
Sinks into port in some well-favoured isle,  
Where billows never roar, and brighter seasons  
smile

The learned critics may be as wise as they please, but there is no undoing the early circumstance which has made some names in literature of significance to us, and has put other names, perhaps even greater, for ever in the dark. Our literary predilections were cast at our birth. So much depends, too, on where we heard a name first, and what world was about the book as we read it. That is the reason why my correspondent's letter is not irrelevant here, for it caught me out. It gave away the game. It showed me that I could never be a critic of letters. When his complaint came to me, some books for review were beside me. But what was I doing? Sitting in the shade, looking absently at a dazzling summer afternoon just beyond the chair, for I had just read with close attention this fragment of English prose

"From three to nine miles north-eastward of the northern part of Sangi is a group of islets named Nipa, Bukit, Poa, and Liang, respectively, and about nine miles farther eastward is a chain of six islets and two detached reefs, which extend about nine miles in a north-north-east and opposite directions. From this islet, the southernmost of this chain, a reef of rocks extends some distance southward, and it should be given a good berth. All the above islets are covered with coconut trees, but very little is known about them."

Then there followed, for over 300 closely printed pages, references to many outlandish names, probably occult, such

as Busu Busu ("good drinking water may be obtained from a spring at the foot of the hill behind the missionary's house"), Berri Berri Road, Rau Strait ("it has not been surveyed, and is dangerous"), Tanjong Salawai, Pulo Gunong Api (I know enough to say that that means the island of the mountain of fire), Gisi and Pakal, Ceram Laut ("is high and hilly, and had on it, in 1898, a remarkable tree, 428 feet over the sea, which makes a good mark"), Suruake of the Goram Islands ("the inhabitants are quarrelsome and warlike . . . anchorage off Wiseleat village, on the north side, in 24 fathoms, at over one mile from the shore and 130 yards from the steep-to reef, with a hawser to the latter to prevent driving"). I had been idling with that book, with the work of the latest fashionable novelists waiting beside me for my immediate attention, all the morning, and could not let it go. Then came the querulous letter pointing out my indifference to the English literature of the eighteenth century; which in one respect was unjust, for if once I got going on Gulliver I might soon be in prison for sedition. Yet the rebuke was well merited. I would sooner read any volume of Directions for Pilots than some poetry I could name. (And I should like to ask whether Ceram Laut has not been sighted since 1898.) On the whole, I would much rather sit in a cabin of a ship which had just made fast again, listen to the men who had brought her home, than read the best modern fiction. I should feel nearer to the centre of life. Never mind the name of the book which had made that a finer day for me. You will not find it in the circulating libraries; but it has an official note, initialled, and is guaranteed by the Hydrographic Office, Admiralty; so there must be something in it. The volume, in fact, is mysterious only in the queer effect it has upon me. I dare not recommend it for general reading, but I myself would sooner peruse it than the essays of Addison because I get more out of it. I should like to describe, in some detail, the place where I bought it, the man who sold it to me, what he said about it, and the seclusions of the Java and the Arafura Seas where, far

how quaint it is, the way the romantic use the facts!—and the grandchildren of the Saltee rovers were carrying coal in baskets, from which black liquid poured down their bodies. To judge by their appearance of bowed and complete submission, every drop of pirate blood had been washed out of them long ago.

There might have been mountains behind the town, though one could not be sure. Something seemed to be there, but it was thin and smeared. Africa, as well as I could see it that morning, was the office of a shipping agent, where we gossiped of steamers and the men we knew, looked at maps on the walls, and wondered what the agent's fading photographs represented. Then we caught an electric tram, which took us to an hotel in a French town, a town well ordered and righteously commercial, and garrisoned by French soldiers in cherry-coloured bloomers; for this was years ago. The bedroom had a tiled floor, but no fireplace, because the house was built on the theory that we were in Africa, and by getting under a red bale of eiderdown one managed to keep from perishing.

The best moments of a traveller are not likely to be divined from the list of the ship's ports of call. They are inconsequential. It is no good looking for them. They do not seem to be native to any particular spot on earth. They have no relation to the chart. It is impossible to define every one of their elements, and, worse luck, they are not rewards for endurance and patience. You do not go to them. They surprise you as you pass. Nor should they serve as material for travel narrative unless you would make your report delusive, for they have no geographical bearings. Nobody is likely to find them again. It is no good talking about them. Yet without them travel would be worse than the job of the urban dust collector. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and there is no telling how and in what place the happy incidence of light and understanding will come.

Last summer, when walking through a sunken lane in Dorset, there was the ghost of an odour I knew, though I

Let us never challenge the gods; who do not exist, as to-day we all know, yet who may grow peevish if we not only deny their existence, but behave with arrogance, as though to show them that man is superior to Olympus.

I remember the smoke-room of a steamer which was almost deserted, for it was near midnight. Three fellow-passengers sat near me, and they were estimating the hour of our arrival in the morning. Their discourse was leisurely and casual, but they were confident; they knew; and with the elaborate and solid worth of that saloon to accommodate even our tobacco smoke, what doubt could there be about human judgements? As to our arrival, we could tell you within about fifteen minutes. I think my fellow-travellers were men of commerce, for they were familiar with the habits of our line and of many other lines; they could judge the hour when we should be home; and they were assured that to relieve human-kind of poverty and of war would be to invite God's punishment for unfaithfulness. Then they emptied their glasses and left the place to me and a huge American negro pugilist, who had a fur-lined overcoat and many diamonds, and who spoke to the steward as a gruff man would to a dog.

Our steamer gave the assurance of that astronomical certitude which is inherent in great and impersonal affairs. She held on immensely and with celerity. Sometimes, when one of the screws came out of the water, a loose metal ash-tray on the table forgot itself, became alive and danced, like an escape of the amusement felt by the ship over some secret knowledge she had; hilarity she at once suppressed. The ash-tray became still and apparently ashamed of what it had done. The slow rolling of the steamer was only the maintenance of her poise in a wonderful speed. If your head leaned against the woodwork you could hear the profound murmuring of her energy. We were doing well. No doubt the men who had just gone out were right—at least, about the time of our arrival.

Outside, the promenade deck was vacant. Most of its

lights were out. The portal to the room which accommodated our tobacco pipes announced itself to the darkness with a bright red bulb and black lettering. There was an infinity of night. One could not see far into it, but it poured over us in an unending flood. The red bulb seemed rather small after all. There was no sea. There was only an occasional sound and an illusion of fleeting spectres. Going down the muffled stairway to my cabin I met my steward. He warned me that we should be in by seven o'clock. The corridor below was silent, its doors all shut, and another steward was at the end of the empty lane, contemplative, reposeful, the unnecessary watchman of a secure city. The accustomed sounds of the ship, far away and subdued, were the earnest of inevitable routine and predestination. Almost home now! I switched off the light, began planning the morrow into a well-earned holiday.

And then someone was shaking me with insistence. It was only the steward. The electric light was bright in my eyes.

Not six yet, surely.

Not quite four, sir. But there's not enough water for her to get in. Better get up now. A tug is expected.

Here we were then. The engines had done their work. They had stopped. Though it was so early, I could hear people constantly passing along the corridor, and not with their usual leisure. Fussy folk! Plenty of time to shave and put things away! No need to hurry when this was the end of it.

On deck it was still dark. Nothing could be heard but the running of the tide along the body of our stationary ship. The note of the water was pitched curiously high. It was something like the sound of a tide running out quickly over shallows. An officer hurried through a loose group of passengers, politely disengaged himself from their migraines and vanished into the darkness of the after-deck. Written on the only a few lights. They seemed to be arbitrary. Wales, & of fragments of the ship could be seen. She was but a jetty, we'dar was doing nothing, and her people wandered

about her busily but without aim. I could hear an officer's voice loudly directing some business by the poop; there was that sound, and the thin hissing of a steam-pipe.

A big man in an ulster, whom I recognised as one of the fellows who, the night before, had decided what hour we should arrive, began telling me rapidly how necessary it was for him to catch some train, "absolutely without fail." I think he said he had an important engagement. I was not listening to him very intently. The ship was aground.

He did not appear to know it. Like the other passengers, he moved to and fro, all ready to start for home, within a few paces of his suitcase. These people waited in confident groups for the tender, guarding their possessions. Some of them were annoyed because the tender was dilatory.

There was no sign of a tender. Beyond us were only the murmuring of the running waters and the darkness. Through the night a distant sea-lamp stared at us so intently that it winked but once a minute. Its eye slowly closed then, as if tired, but at once became fixed and intent again.

I was leaning over the port side, and the port side was leaning too. She had a decided list. A seaman came near me and dropped the lead overside. He gave the result to someone behind me, and I turned. Two fathoms! The mate grinned and left us.

The darkness, as we waited for the tender which did not come, was thinned gradually by light from nowhere. I could now see the creature with one yellow eye. It was a skeleton standing in the sea on many legs. Some leaden clouds formed on the roof of night. The waters expanded. Low in the east, where the dawn was a pale streak, as if day had got a bright wedge into the bulk of chaos, was the minute black serration of a town. The guardian lamp at sea grew longer legs as the water fell, and when at last the sun looked at us the skeleton was standing on wide yellow sands. The ship was heeling over considerably now, for she was on the edge of the sands; the engineers put over a ladder and went to look at the propellers.

It was hours past the time of our arrival. There was no tender. There was no water. The distant town was indifferent. It made no sign. Perhaps it did not know we were there. The lady passengers, careless of their appearance, slept in deck-chairs, grey and unkempt. The man who had to be in London before noon "without fail" was also asleep, and his children were playing about a coil of rope with a kitten.

## IX

My first attempt to read at sea was a dreary failure. Yet how I desired a way to salvation. We were over the Dogger Bank. It was midwinter. It was my first experience of deep water. A sailor would not call fifteen fathoms deep water, I know that now, yet if you suppose the North Sea is not the real thing when your ship is a trawler, and the time is Christmas, then do not go to find out. Do not look for the pleasure of travel there in that month.

That morning, hanging to the guide-rope of a perpendicular ladder, and twice thrown off to dangle free in a ship which seemed to be turning over, I mounted to watch the coming of the sun. It was a moment of stark revelation, and I was shocked by it. I could see I was alone with my planet. We faced each other. The size of my own globe—the coldness of its grandeur—the ease with which swinging shadows lifted us out of a lower twilight to glimpse the dawn, an arc of sun across whose bright face black shapes were moving, and then plunged us into gloom again—its daunting indifference! Where was my faith? No friend was there. There were myself and luck. That night a great gale blew.

So I tried Omar Khayyam, which was an act of folly. I could not resign myself even to the ship's Bible, the only other book aboard. Printed matter has no heart when life is acutely conscious of itself, and is aware, without the nudge of poetry, of its fragility and briefness. I tried to read the Christmas number of a magazine, but that was



worse than twiddling the thumbs. "You come into the wheel-house," said the mate, "and stand the middle watch with me. It's all right when you face it." In the still seclusion of the wheel-house after midnight, where the sharpest sound was the occasional abrupt clatter of the rudder chains in their pipes, where the loosened stars shot across the windows and back again, where the faint glow of the binnacle lamp showed, for me, but my companion's priestly face, and where anarchy occasionally crashed on our walls, I found what books could not give me. The mate sometimes mumbled, or put his face close to the glass to peer ahead. They had a youngster one voyage, he told me, who was put aboard another trawler, going home. The youngster was ill. That night it blew like hell out of the north-west. In the morning, so the hands advised the mate, "the youngster's bunk had been slept in, so they said the other trawler would never get to port, and she didn't." I listened to the mate, and the sweep of the waves. The ship trembled when she was struck. But it seemed to me that all was well, though I don't know why. What has reason to do with it? Is the sea rational?

After that voyage there were others, and sometimes a desert of time to give to books. Yet if to-night we were crossing the Bay, going out, and she was a wet ship, I should have a dim reminder of the sensations of my first voyage, and much prefer the voice of a shipmate to a book. The books then would not be out of the trunk. They would do well where they were, for a time. The first week, uncertain and strange, the ship unfamiliar and not at all like the good ships you used to know so well; her company not yet a community, and the old man annoyed with his owners, his men, his coal, and his mistaken choice of a profession—the first week never sees the barometer set fair for reading. Some minds indeed will never hold tight to a book when at sea. Mine will not. What is literature when you have a trade-wind behind you? I have tried a classical author then, but it was easier to keep the eye on the quivering light

from the seas reflected on the bright wall of my cabin. It might have been the very spirit of life dancing in my own little place. It was joyous. It danced lightly till I was hypnotised, and slept in full repose on a certitude of the virtue of the world.

But recently there was an attempt, the time being spring, to cut out the dead books from my shelves, the books in which there was no longer a sign of life. Then I took that classical author, rejected one memorable voyage, and looked at his covers. When he was on the ship with me I found him meagre and uncommunicative. Something has happened to him in the meantime, however. He is all right now. His covers, I notice, have been nibbled by exotic cockroaches, and their cryptic message adds a value to the classic which I find new and good. Scattered on the floor, too, I see a number of guide-books. They are soiled. They are ragged. Their maps are hanging out. When I really needed them I was shy of being seen in their company, and they were left in the ship's cabin during the day, or in the hotel bedroom. The maps and plans were studied. Sometimes they were torn out of a book and pocketed, I could never find the courage to walk about Rome or Palermo with a Baedeker. It always seemed to me like wearing a little Union Jack or the Stars and Stripes on the coat collar.

Those guide-books were most interesting on the wet days of a journey, or when it was impossible or undesirable to go roaming. They were full of descriptions of those things one must on no account overlook when in a new country. Yet in the fine morning after a wet day, when I went out without a guide-book, the little living peculiarities of the town, which the book had not even mentioned—because everybody ought to be aware of them, of course—were so remarkable that the place where Ariadne was turned into a fountain, and where Aphrodite tried to seduce another handsome young mortal, were forgotten.

So once, when hunting near Syracuse for "the famous *Latomie*, or stone quarries, in certain of which the Athenian

prisoners were confined," and several of whom were spared, so the book said, because they could repeat choruses of Euripides, I met a cheerful goatherd, an old man, with a newly fallen kid under his arm, who told me in an American language so modern that I hardly knew it that he used to sell peanuts in Chicago. He did not repeat choruses from Euripides, but even the great dramatist, I am sure, would have been surprised by the fables of the peanut merchant. I forgot the quarries while listening to them. The fabulist and I sat with our backs against a boulder over which leaned an olive-tree. The goats stood around, and stared at us; and not, I believe, without some understanding of their master's stories.

I am reminded of this because a map of south-eastern Sicily is hanging out of a book, the banner of a red-letter day. I rescued the volume from the mass of discarded lumber, and found that inside the cover of the book I had drawn a plan of the harbour of Tunis. Why? I've forgotten the reason. But I remember Tunis, for I had been drawn thither by this very book, which had said that nobody should leave the Mediterranean without seeing Tunis. There it was, one day. From the deck of my French ship I saw electric trams and the familiar *hôtels des étrangers*. A galley with pirates at its sweeps was almost alongside us, and desperately I hailed it, threw in my bag, and directed them to take me to a steamer flying the Italian flag, for that steamer, clearly enough, was leaving Tunis at once. That was the ship for me. There was some difficulty with the dark ruffians who manned the galley, who followed me aboard the steamer. There they closed round me, a motley and savage crew. They demanded gold in some quantity, and with menacing flourishes, shattering voices, and hot eager eyes. Their leader was a huge negro in a white robe and a turban, whose expressive gargoyles, with a loose red gash across its lower part, had been pitted by smallpox. I did not like his face. He towered over me, and leaned down to bring his ferocity closer to me. Some Italian sailors stopped to watch the

scene, and I thought they were pitying this Englishman. But the latter was weary of Roman ruins, of hotels, of other thoughtful provision for strangers surprising in its open and obvious accessibility, and of guides and thieves—especially of thieves, shameless insatiable, and arrogant in their demands for doing nothing whatever. At first he had paid them, for he was a weak and silly stranger who did not know the land; but now, sick of it all, he turned wearily on that black and threatening gargoyle while it was still in full spate of Arabic. "Shook his fist at it, and cried suddenly what chief mates bawl when things are in a desperate plight and constraint is useless. To his astonishment and relief the negro stepped back, turned to his crew, and said to them sadly, in plain English, 'Come on, it's no bloody good.' The gang left that ship as modestly as carol singers who find they have been chanting 'Christians Awake' to an empty house."

Now, evidently guide-books cannot lead you in such pleasing interludes, and may even beguile you away from them.

I mean that the books cannot guide you to those best rewards for travel unless, of course, they are old and stained. They are full then of interesting addenda of which their editors know nothing, and of symbols with an import only one traveller may read. So when the days come in which, as guide-books, they will not be wanted, you may read in them what is not there. This very guide-book to the Mediterranean, for example, under the heading of 'Oran,' describes it as the capital of a province, military division, 60,000 inhabitants. It is not certain that Oran existed in the time of the Romans. Some people would like us to believe that no place on earth can be of much interest unless the Romans once flattened it into meekness. But we have heard far too much of these Romans. They bore us. To-day we call them captains of industry and company promoters. Oran, or what I could see of it in the dark when we arrived, was as rich in promise as though it

were thoroughly impeded with classical ruins. There were lights that were a concourse of planets, and as I was reading in my bunk the ship was so quiet that you could hear the paint crack on a bulkhead rivet. I was reading this very guide-book then, and it told me that beyond those calm and mysterious planets were Tlemcen, and Ein Sefra, "an oasis 1110 metres above the sea-level belonging to the Duled Sidi Sheikh. Here one catches a glimpse of the Algerian desert, which is the fringe of the Great Sahara." I caught that glimpse the very next week.

These guide-books, when you are home again, are as good as great literature. There, for another instance, is Baedeker's *Switzerland*. Now the truth is, that book, bought for the first journey to the Alps, was among the things I forgot to pack. It was never missed. It is only to-day that we find it is indispensable. For it was bought in the winter of 1913. Again it was night when we arrived. A sleigh met us, and took us noiselessly into the vaguely white unknown. Pontresina is a good name. In the morning there were the shutters of a bedroom to be opened, and a child who was with me gazed with wide eyes when the morning light discovered for him a field of ice poised ethereally on clouds, though the night had not gone from the valley below us; above the ice was a tincture of rose on far peaks. Is it likely he will forget it? Or I? Anyhow, there is a diorama of those peaks in our guide-book, and what rosy light is absent from that picture we can give to it.

## x

Mayne Reid once thoroughly persuaded us that to have a full life we should kill grizzly bears, bison, and Indians. We were so sure he was right that school and work in London were then the proof of our reduction to the humdrum. We have been, since then, near enough to a bison to try it with a biscuit, but have never seen the smoke of a wigwam even in the distance. There remains a faint hope that a day

will come when we shall see that smoke, for such a name as Athabasca is still in the world of the topeless towers of Ilium but some records of modern hunters of big game, published exultingly, have cured us of an old affliction of the mind. As far as we are concerned, the lives of lions and bears are secure.

We now open a new volume on sport with an antipathy increased to a repugnance we never felt for Pawnees, through the reading of a recent narrative by an American writer, who had been collecting in Africa for a museum. He confessed that if he had not been a scientist he would have felt some remorse when he saw the infant still clinging to the breast of its mother a gorilla whom he had just murdered so he shot the infant without remorse, because he was acting scientifically. As a corpse, the child added to the value of its dead mother a nice group. That tableau at that moment when the job was neatly finished, must have looked rather like good luck when collecting types in a foreign slum. How happy he must have felt when skinning the child!

The heroic big game hunter, with his picturesque gear, narrow escapes and dreadful hardships, is a joke it is easier to understand since our so very recent experience of man himself as a dangerous animal. The sabre-toothed tiger of the past was a dove compared with the creature who is pleased to suppose that he was created in the likeness of his Maker. No predatory dinosaur ever equalled man's praiseworthy understudy of the Angel of Death. Some years ago on the arrival of fresh news at headquarters in France of another most ingenious and successful atrocity, I remarked to a Staff officer of the Intelligence Department that if this sort of thing developed progressively it would end in the enforced recruitment of orang-utans. But that officer happened to be a naturalist. No good, he replied.

They wouldn't do these things. Rightfulness is the prerogative of man who won the privilege in his upward progress.

With his modern weapons and ammunition, an experienced

sportsman challenging a lion stands in little more danger than if he were buying a rug. The shock of his bullet would stagger a warehouse. It pulps the vitals of the animal. There is a friend of mine whose pastime it is to shoot big game, and we should pity any tiger he meets. It is not a tiger to him. It is only a target, which he regards with the composure into which he settles when someone brings him a long drink on a salver; and his common habit with a target is to group his shots till they blot out the bull's-eye. What chance has a tiger against so tender a creature? A rabbit would have more, for it is smaller. But at least it can be said for my friend that it merely happens that he prefers that sort of fun to golf; he attaches no importance to it. Though he has shot an unfortunate example of every large mammal Asia has to offer, he does not plead that he has done so in the name of science. Man himself, with appliances that reduce the craft of the tiger to a few interesting tricks, and an arm which paralyses a whale with one blow, is the most terrible animal in the world. He is the Gorgon. It is his glance which turns life to stone.

Science, as stuffed animals are often called, excuses the abomination of any holocaust. If a nightingale were dilated with cotton-wool instead of music, that would be science, supposing it were the last of the nightingales. The reason given for the slaughter of so many harmless gorillas in the neighbourhood of Lake Kivu by several travellers was that those rare animals are dying out, and museums required them. Yet it may be said for us that these sportsmen find it necessary to excuse their behaviour to-day. They must explain at least why they feel no remorse. No longer may one destroy a family of apes and boast of it afterwards. If the crime is confessed publicly, its author is careful to observe that he acted in the name of science, no doubt that we may thus distinguish him from a man who would have done something like it in the name of religion. We are sometimes advised that the value of a training in science is that it makes honesty of thought more useful than we find it in the ordinary

into the world, and bestows it on creatures other than his fellows, how did he come by it, and what may be its value in the evolution of life? Is it useless, like saintliness?

## XI

The first officer, the only man in the ship who could converse freely with me in English, waved his hand as he went overside. He was going ashore to some friends. The shore of the island was just out of hailing distance. The setting sun was below the height of the land. The huts among the columns of the palms along the beach were becoming formless. Even by day our steamer, among those islands of Indonesia, gave me the idea that she intruded from another and a coarser world. Land was nearly always in sight, but whether distant or close to our beam it might have been a vagary, the vaporous show of a kingdom with which we could have no contact. It would have no name. It had not been seen before. We were the first to see it, and the last. To-morrow some other shape would be there, or nothing. The only reality was our steamer and its Dutchmen, chance blunderers into a region which was not for us. Even when the sun was over the ship, and the blaze on the deck was like exposure to a furnace, the coast in sight was but the filmy stuff of a legend.

But now the sun was going, and in those seas that spectacle was always strangely disturbing. It was a celestial display which should have been accompanied by the rolling of thunder and the shaking of earth. One watched for the sudden peopling of those far and luminous battlements of the sky. But there was no sound. There was no movement. It was an empty display; we might have been surprised by the beginning of a rehearsal which was postponed. One could not help feeling the imminence of a revelation to men who now, open-mouthed, had paused in their foolish activities, and were waiting; and so it was astonishing, after that warning prelude, that only darkness should fall. We were reprimed. Perhaps Heaven did not know what to do with us.



The pale huts receded into nothing. The black filigree of palm fronds above them dissolved in night. The smooth water of the anchorage vanished without a whisper. The day was done. In the alleyway on which my cabin opened a few electric sconces made solid a short walk, which was suspended with vague ends in the dark. The weight of a heated silence, in which there was no more to be discerned than that short promenade, fell over the ship. It was astonishing that she could be so quiet.

In my cabin even an electric fan would have been a companion, but it would not work, it was dumb. The cabin was only a recess in solitude. Every book there had been read, and even all the advertisements in the newspapers, which were two months old, and had been used for packing. When I left London I took with me some clear and scientific advice about the collecting of insects. "Not butterflies and moths." My instructions were specific. "Only diptera, hymenoptera, and bugs like these." The bugs called "these" were exhibited and demonstrated in their British counterparts.

It appeared that I might be of aid to a new study, which now is earnestly seeking for an answer to the growing challenge of the insect world to man's dominion of this earth. This quest was urged on me with cool insistence, careless of a suspicion I might have had that there may be, to an overseeing and directing mind unknown, worse pests than bugs on earth. I accepted the job, the tins, the pins, the forceps, the bottles, chemicals, nets, and all, and submitted to a series of elementary lessons. I began with the feeling of a Jain in the matter, but at last was persuaded that I should be performing a social service, for I was reminded that a tsetse fly could make as good an exhibit of me as ever man made of a gorilla.

With some little entomological routine to be got through daily, I began to understand why it was the Victorian naturalists showed a fortitude in adversity which had they resolved, not on beetles but on something nobler, might

have got them to Truth itself. On tropical days so searching that nothing but a sudden threat would have moved a man from where he happened to be resting, I picked up my net with alacrity, filled a little bag with bottles, and toiled to some place which, so the sun and wind told me, would make the shade of old Wallace eagerly readjust his ghostly spectacles as he watched me; and I saw clearly enough then that at an earlier age and with a stouter nerve I should have found fun in collecting record horns and tusks. It was usually in a secluded corner where I was alone; though once, near a Malay village in Celebes, in a clearing which had already become a tangled shrubbery again, I noticed at last a native, his kris in his sarong, sternly watching me. He stood like a threatening image, and whenever I glanced casually in his direction, which I did as often as dignity allowed, he still had that severe look. Presently I found that this area was a Mohammedan graveyard, for I tripped over one of the hidden stones while stealthily following the eccentric course of a fly which looked attractively malignant. The Malay stood over me as I pulled out some thorns with forced deliberation. He did not speak. He picked up a spare net, and spent the rest of the morning adding industriously to my collection.

The close scrutiny of one patch of forest into which direct sunlight fell, with the eye watchful for the slightest movement, gave one a notion of the density with which that apparently empty jungle was peopled. A biologist once said that most of the world's protoplasm is locked up in the bodies of insects. You would think so when, having missed a miniature bogy with the net, you examined the place where it had so miraculously disappeared. (Sometimes it was in a fold of the net all the time, discovered when it nailed a careless hand.)

Nothing appears to be there but fronds and branches, yet as soon as the image of the object you missed begins to fade from your recollection, you see, sitting under a leaf, a robber-fly eating a victim as large as itself. Near it

and it would but add interest to a long voyage for dotting seamen. The trouble for a restless soul begins only when he would turn aside and go where other people do not. Then he finds that the herd has no sympathy for one of its members who would leave the farmer's field, no sympathy, no advice, no help, nothing but curt warnings and mocking prophecies.

After a long and faithful adherence to the beaten tracks you reach some distant coastal outpost, and, enforced, there you pause. There is nothing else to do, so you look inland to the hills. What do they hide? The exiles on the spot, through envy and jealousy—for it would be absurd to suppose that they do not want to lose you—deny all access to those hills. That outpost is touched by a steamer at least once a fortnight, and, while waiting for it, every evening when the other men are as idle as yourself, you ask disturbing questions about the land beyond. The men reclining about the room murmur that nobody ever goes. Some day, of course, before they return home, they intend to stand on those hills. Just once. Wants a bit of doing, though. Pretty bad, the fevers. Can't trust the natives. Last year a young fellow, just out, he tried it. Thought we didn't know. Wouldn't listen to us. Said he would be back in a week. He isn't back yet. And there was a Dutchman once. Heard about him? Well. The sagacious informant here glances round to see who is present, and leans over to whisper, ending his story with a malignant chuckle. 'And served him right too.'

If you listened to those fellows in complete social credulity you would merely stay at the rest-house till the next ship came along, and, when she departed, so would you, still gazing at the unknown over her taffrail. But she has not arrived yet, and therefore every day you look to the hills, and then explore a path which leads, so it seems, towards those ramparts of cobalt. You have not the cheerful idea, of course, of continuing long enough. That would show courage instead of sociability. You merely wish to gratify,

as much as a quiet creature dare, a sinful desire to approach the forbidden.

Then, in some manner, those hills vanish. After five minutes on that track they go. An illusion? You continue till you reach a secluded valley, a steep and narrow place about which nobody has warned you, though to warn a friend of it, in case he should stray that way by chance, seems at a glance to be a positive duty. You watch a river come down turbulently through woods that are as dark and still as bale. It goes over rocks, but with hardly a sound, as though it were muffled. A native crouches on the coiled roots of a tree on the opposite shore, and eyes you. But he does not move his head. He says nothing. He continues to watch you, and he does not move. Is it possible to get beyond that point? Very likely not. The very hills have disappeared. That dark forest, if it is not impenetrable, would be better if it were. The land is only a vision, and that native is the warning figure in it. You shout over to the figure, but it does not answer. It looks away. So you turn back, listen to more stories for a few more nights in the rest-house, and leave with the next ship.

There is the island of Celebes. Ships go to it direct from England. A child could manage the journey thither. I could not count the number of villages of its coast off which anchored my local trading steamer; we stood in and out of Celebes for weeks. I sought for a man who could tell me about the interior of that island—which has about the same area as Ireland, but a coast-line long enough for an archipelago—but never found him. Picture post-cards may be obtained at Macassar and Menado, and trips by motor-car bought for as far as the roads go. But Brighton has the same advantages. Yet when it came to the question of a journey into the interior, then you might as well have been in a London post-office appealing through the wire netting to a young lady counting insurance stamps for a way to send a message to Joanna Southcott about that box. Yet there cannot be another large island anywhere in the world

with shores so inviting, because those of Celebes are uninhabited, except for short lengths, and the mountains of the interior of that island, which is crossed by the equator, are so fantastic that they might be luding the wonders of all outlandish legends. No matter. There is no approach, apparently, to the heights. A spell is on the place. You must be content to watch that coast and those hills pass, unless you are more daring than this deponent in flaunting the settled ways and opinions of your fellow-men.

The time does come, it does come, when you can stand the chartered paths no longer. It is all very well for the people at home, misled by the narratives of flamboyant tourists, to suppose that the track you are following is one only for the stout of heart. By the map, doubtless it looks as though it were. But you know better. The chief difficulty on that track, however devious and far it may seem from London, is that you cannot get away from it. While this is strictly true, it must be remembered that it is not altogether a simple excursion for a wayfarer to leave the highways and cross alone and in safety some of the moors of England. The warnings of the friends with whom you consort for a few days at a rest-house in the tropics merit attention. There is something in what they say.

At last you are in no doubt about it. If the warning fables were only half as bad as the reality, still the common path could hold you no longer. Boredom in Labuan is no different from boredom in Highgate. With deliberation you leave your luggage into a godown, careless whether or not you ever see it again, and set out light-foot for the unknown quarter where health is the only fortune, and where all the money in the world cannot buy refreshment when it does not exist, nor good-will from creatures who do not like your face. If your good luck or common sense prove inadequate, then you are aware you will not return, but there is satisfaction in the certain knowledge that if you have to pay the ultimate forfeit it will be because you ought to pay it. You cannot find that satisfaction in London,

which is in many ways worse than the desert. If you prove good enough, the wild will reward you with a safe passage; but the city will even punish qualities which make men honest citizens and pleasant neighbours.

In weeks of toil you get far beyond the last echo of the coast. You can imagine you have reached, not another place, but another age, and have entered an early geological period of the earth. Soon after the beginning of the journey up-country there was a suspicion, when another silent reach of the river opened, where immense trees overhung and were motionless, and were doubled in the mirror, that now you were about to wake up. This would go. In reality you were not there.

The paddlers ceased. A buffalo, a bronze statue on a strip of sand in the water, stared at the lot of you as you rounded the point. Then he erupted that scene. It did exist. It was alive. The first ripple from the outer world had come to stir into protest that timeless peace.

The river is left, and a traverse made of the forest. Ranges are crossed. You become a little doubtful of your whereabouts. The map treasured in a rubber bag now abandons you to an inderterminate land. The natives are shy, food is scarce and a little queer, and exposure and wounds bring to memory the unfriendly yarns of the settlement far away. About time to turn back? But the inclination is to go on, for the days seem brighter and more innocent than you have ever known them to be. Even food has become an enjoyable way to continue life; and the camp at sundown, when, offering grace for the pleasure of conscious continuance in fatigue, you look upwards to a fading stratum of gold on the roof of the forest across the stream, and the cicadas begin their pæan, is richer than success. The smell of the wood smoke is pleasant. Only at night, when the darkness is so well established that it could be the end of daylight, and the distant sounds in the forest are inexplicable if they are not menacing, do the thoughts turn backward. It would be better, you think then, to be safe.

But the next day you discover that you are not alone in that unknown country. A man meets you, and says he has heard you were about. He has been trying to find you. He would like to hear the news. He behaves as though you were his best friend. You learn that he has been there for nearly a year. He came to that corner of the continent from the other side. He says this as though he were merely remarking that it rained yesterday, and the extraordinary character of such a journey makes you glance at him for some clue to the reason for so obvious a lie. Yet no, that fellow is not a liar—not in such a small matter, anyhow. What is he doing there? Oh, just looking round for gold, or tin, or a job. Have you heard a word, he asks, of a railway coming along?

You cannot journey to any unusual quarter without surprising there one of these wanderers. He is looking a country over, and has lived with the chief's daughter, and improved the chief's importance with neighbouring tribes, and has kept a wary eye open for gold or anything else which might be lying about, long before regular communication was made with the sea, and years ahead of the bold explorers about whom the newspapers make a fuss. He saw the land before the missionaries. These wanderers make rough maps of their own, they are familiar with the most unlikely recesses of the land—which they reached, by the way, from China, or Uganda, or Bogota, or wherever they were last. If one of them tells you his name you need not believe him. The place of his birth is not the place of his confidence. It is no good asking him what he is going to do next, for he does not know. While you are with him you feel that a better companion for such a country was never born and when you leave him you know you will never see him again, nor hear of him.

## XIII

There was an island, which must have evaporated with the morning mists like other promising things, called Bragman. It is recorded by Maundeville, and he had positive knowledge that on Bragman was "no Thief, nor Murderer, nor common Woman, nor poor Beggar, nor ever was Man slain in that Country. And because they be so true and so righteous, and so full of good Conditions, they were never grieved with Tempests, nor with Thunder, nor with Lightning, nor with Hail, nor with Pestilence, nor with War, nor with Hunger, nor with any other Tribulation, as we be, many Times, amongst us, for our Sins."

The fascination of islands is felt by all of us, but Bragman might not be to everybody's taste. Some people might say it would have no taste. They would prefer an infested attic in Rotherhithe or Ostend, or any refuge with sufficient sin about it to prove they were alive and in danger of hell-fire. For others it would certainly give a sense of rest from the many advantages of Europe. They might feel that for the sake of peace they could endure it. What is more, we know that the pleasures of sin can be ridiculously overrated. The most doleful places in the world, where youth seeking joy in recklessness is sure to be soused in ancient and unexpected gloom, are what are known to the feeble-minded and to writers of moral tracts as "haunts of pleasure." Nobody points out to the eager and guileless, who have been misled by the glamour which literature can cast over even a bathroom, and by the lush reminiscences of dodderers, that for *gaiety of atmosphere the red lights of the places of pleasure* are quite extinguished by the attractions of a temperance hotel on a wet night. The haunts of pleasure take their place in the museum of mankind's mistakes alongside the glories of war.

That island of Maundeville's, which he called Bragman, is only a curious name for one of the Hesperides, or the Fortunate Isles, or the Isles of the Blessed. Some name



it Eden or Elysium. We place it where we will, and give it the name of our choice. But naturally it must be an island, uncontaminated by the proximity of a mainland. Every man has his dream of such a sanctuary, and every community its legend, because in our hearts we are sure the world is not good enough for us. Even the South Sea islanders have a word of a better place, the asylum they have never reached in all their thousand years of wandering from west to east about the Pacific. Perhaps man goes to war, or seeks pleasure wantonly, merely because at intervals he becomes desperately disappointed in his search for what is not of this earth. What does that suggest? But we will leave the suggestion to the metaphysicians, who are as interesting when at such speculations as the fourteenth-century cartographers were at geography. It may mean something highly important, but what that is we shall never see as we see daylight when the generalisation of a mathematical genius illuminates and relates the apparently irrelevant speculations of arduous but unimaginative arithmeticians. If we would see the turrets of the Holy City, then a stroll round the corner to the Dog and Duck before closing-time may do as well as a longer journey. We only know that all the supreme artists appear to have been privileged, as was Moses, with a sight of the coast, glorious but remote, and that the memory of the unattainable vision gives to their music and verse the melancholy and the golden sonority which to us, and we do not know why, are the indisputable sign of their greatness.

"To reach felicity," says Mr. Firestone in his *Coasts of Illusion*, "we must cross the water." There is no reason for this, but we know it is true, for felicity is where we are not. We must cross it to an island, and a small one. A large island would be useless. It ought to be uninhabited, too, or at the worst it should be very rarely boarded by other wanderers. What account could the company of the *Hispaniola* have rendered of the pirates' hoard if they had sought it on a mainland? Where would Robinson Crusoe

be now if his island had been Australia? Lost among the dry records of geographical discovery. A large island could not hold the treasure we are after. I remember a shape on the horizon, which often was visible from a Devonshire hill, though sometimes it had gone. Its nature depended, I thought, on the way of the sun and wind. It was a cloud. It was very distant. It was a whale. It was my imagination. It was nothing; it was unapproachable. But one morning at sunrise I put my head out of the scuttle of a little cutter, and the material universe had broken loose. The tiny ship was heaving on a ground-swell, vast undulations of glass, and over us titanic masonry was toppling in ruin—I feared the explosions of surf would give a last touch to a collapsing island, and Lundy would fall on us. We landed on a beach no larger than a few bushels of shingle. It was enclosed by green slopes and high walls of rock, and we climbed a track from the beach that mounted amid sunlight and shadow. The heat of the upper shimmering platform of granite and heath above the smooth sea, and its smell and look of antiquity, said that it had been abandoned and forgotten, that it had remained apart from the affairs of a greater and more important world since the creation. That was my first island, and I still think its one disadvantage is that it is only twelve miles off-shore.

For perhaps an island landfall should come only after a long and uncertain voyage. Its coast must appear in a way that suggests as an absurdity that the captain could have performed a miracle with such easy exactitude. This landfall is a virgin gift to us by chance. Indeed most small islands, when lifted by a ship, give that idea. That is why they are the origin of the better legends of man, and the promise of earthly felicity. They are the dream surprised in daylight on the ocean by the voyager, caught napping in the sun, and we know that a foot set on those impalpable colours would wake the gods to their forgetfulness, and away the wraith would go. Not for us. That is why the ship always sails past.

## XIV

Let something survive on earth, if it be only the record of Maundeville's island, which humanity cannot violate. I am glad Amundsen returned safely, but I glad also because the North Pole compelled even our wonderful aeroplanes to treat it with respect. Without guessing what our trouble is, we may be growing too clever. Our very boldness may hide that fact from us. It would be a pity if the earth became tired of us, as once it grew weary of the dinosaurs, who appear to have overdone their part. They grew too big. A traveller but recently returned from the Upper Amazon asks, for instance, what the future of that region is to be. 'Unless oil,' says this gentleman, 'renews interest in this part of the world, large sections may revert to savagery, as, for instance, in the Upper Napo, where already the rubber gatherers have withdrawn, and the Indian tribes who once occupied the territory have returned to their original haunts. Clearly, then, the Indian tribes must have deserted their original haunts. Was that because of the rubber gatherers? However, these savages may be compelled again to leave their original haunts. This explorer suggests that some of the forest trees could be readily converted into alcohol though he adds that not much can be done without better transport, and his idea is that the use of flying-boats or hydroplanes, a use he describes as intelligent, would in that wasted region make things possible which otherwise would be put out of the question. And then, to show that this beneficent development is really in the air, and may blossom soon he reports that the Murato Indians of the Pastazo River have a curious saying. They say, 'When the white man comes with wings we are going to die.'

We shall never doubt that what has been revealed only to the superior race of whites—or, as Mr. E. M. Forster describes us, the 'pinko greys'—is better than any idea of an inferior colour. Alcohol and pulp to us are the better forms for trees, their spiritual transmutation as it were, and death

in flying-machines more desirable than what we call savagery. The white man with his *burden* feels that he has not reconciled himself to his god unless he has converted a mountain or a wood into something like Widnes or Dowlais. When the mountain is a mass of slag on which a community crowds into back-to-back hovels, living there in the sure and certain hope of the Poor Law as the crown to its labours, the man of Western culture looks at the figures in a Blue Book, and knows that he has fulfilled the divine injunction. He never suspects that he may be wrong in that. Impossible that the Murato Indians in their forest may be as pleasing as his flying-machines and alcohol! Yet perhaps the firs and pines of Newfoundland are not necessarily worse than the rolls of paper into which they are converted. The conversion of a forest into a popular Press may be inevitable, like war, but we should not deride the trees which help us to our enlightenment by calling them savage. That seems hardly fair. Let the Murato and all other Indians perish, if there is no other way of getting our alcohol, but to say they are uncivilised as we extinguish them seems a little priggish.

And so regret is not moved as easily as it ought to be when we remember that the pioneer heroes who will venture to convert that solitude of the Amazon into oil and other commodities may—nay, will—die in numbers of various fevers, along with the Indians who will die because of other things. That is not unjust. For we feel that the transformation of all the world into the likeness of the industrious Black Country need not be unduly hastened. There is a tributary of the Amazon I know which once rewarded my admiration for it with some fever, but I do not want it to be punished into the likeness of the factories and slime of the Lea at Stratford-by-Bow. I shall never again see that river and its forest, but it is a pleasure to remember that beyond Whitehall and Versailles there still it flows between its cliffs of foliage, for whoever would like a complete change from the best that man had thought and done, and is willing to pay the price for it. The explorer of the Amazon who

wondered whether it could be translated into a favourable balance sheet says, ' Alone in these dense green solitudes, harmless as they may appear, it is the unknown, the unseen, that terrifies. Man feels that he is battling with an invisible monster even more horrible than the river, because the latter attacks in the open and its death-stroke is relatively quick, whereas the forest *ensnares its victims in the dark*, and slowly draws its coils tighter, till death comes as a merciful relief. But that, of course, is only the impression of a fellow who is not a forest Indian, and finds himself unable to call up a taxicab at the moment he needs it. To alcohol with the place! The truth is the forest was not meant for him. Whatever its design, it was not that. It does not wish to do him any harm and though its countenance has the appearance of it, yet it was *not composed as a look of doom*. If he cannot survive, however, then he must die, and while he is dying it will maintain its aloofness and silence.

So I am glad when the North Pole turns back our aeroplanes. The day will come when they will land there, no doubt. Some black grease, our mark of trade, will be left on the snow, as evidence that man at last has come. But it is just as certain that he will not stay there. Nothing can be done with that place, and it will be left to stare in white emptiness at the stars. We find content, which need not be altogether misanthropic lunacy, in the thought of unprofitable deserts and waste lands. Some parts of earth, we may be assured, twill remain exempt from the effects of our appalling activities. So let us pray for more power to the mosquito's elbow on the Amazon and other wild places.

It is pleasant to remember that he is guarding those regions against swarms and plant for distilling alcohol from the pulp of the forest. Another sort of traveller, Mr Norman Douglas made this confession in a review he wrote of that noble travel narrative, Doughty's *Arabia Deserta*—for I would prefer a little society in this misanthropy. I do not want to be alone in my desert. Says Mr Douglas, with feeling. I re-

call my first view of the Chott country, that sterile salt depression in Tunisia, and my feelings of relief at the idea that this little speck of the globe at least, was irreclaimable for all time; never to be converted into arable land, or even pasture; safe from the intrusion of potato planters and what not; the despair of the politician, the delight of any dreamer who might care to people its melancholy surface with phantoms, mere illusions, of his own."

I sing with him, Hosanna! A great region of South Africa is sinking into a like melancholy surface, for which we may thank whatever desiccating Power there may be. It is returning to the dust. Its water is leaving it. Its stones are now unturned. Its prospect is the deceptive mirage. So kingdoms of Central Asia, once the arenas for the battle glories of turbulent Huns and Tartars, have got tired of us, and now turn to the moon her own aspect of shining and pallid dunes. And there is that part of Arabia known as the Empty Quarter—the Great Red Desert. What a name that is, the Empty Quarter! It is as satisfying to the mind as the Canadian Barren Grounds, a name so much more moving in its implications than all the statistics of the Wheat Belt.

## xv

The traveller was homeward bound, and his liner made its landfall, and turned for Portland and its London pilot. There was no welcome in that look of the coast of home. The shadow of land to port might have been the end of all the headlands of the seas. It was as desolate as Ultima Thule by twilight. There was no rain, but the chill cut to the bone. The sky was old and dark. This frown of the Northland subdued the comfortable life of the ship; it fled below. The little cheerful groups dissolved without a word. The decks were deserted except for two odd figures, muffled like mummies in a shelter on the lee side. He could find nobody who would face it with him. He strolled aft to the shelter where some men who knew the East used to meet before dinner, to smoke and yarn, but only a steward

was there, a disillusioned familiar who was brusquely piling the unwanted wicker-chairs—throwing them at each other

Somehow even the satin-wood panelling of the stairway to the saloon, with its bronze balustrade, appeared now to be out of place. It did not accord with cold draughts. The glow-lamps shone in emptiness, the palms in the corners were dingy. He suspected the life of the ship had suddenly absented itself, and was behind closed doors, whispering of a crisis to which he could get no clue. As he descended to his cabin he paused to watch an officer, muffled in a great-coat, pass from one side of the ship to the other on a deck above him, but the man was preoccupied and hurried, and did not notice that the ship had another lonely ghost wandering about her.

In his cabin the little gilt image of a Buddha, Putai Hoshang, the god of children and earthly joys, passive and happy, regarded him cheerfully from the clothes-chest. That token of the East had more sun in it than all the world into which the steamer had now come. The image was old, perhaps as old as that fading recollection of a land along which the ship was now cruising for haven. Might not that recollection fade utterly before the haven was reached? Was that image cheerful with tidings that were nearer to the springs of life than anything known under the skies of the North? Was it that knowledge which made it confident? There was a suggestion of derision about its happy smile, as though it had a word which made it invulnerable to this bleak air, and to the driving darkness that was the headlong confusion of a region which had lost its light and faith.

The bugle called to dinner. He took no notice of it. He thought he would sooner pack up, at least he could then confirm, putting away some good things he had found in Brunei, Palembang and Peking, that somewhere life was ardent and young, and was light-hearted while making beautiful things. He placed a porcelain bowl beside Buddha. The two were worth looking at. If you stood in a certain way a golden dragon was hinted in the azure of the bowl.

The man who made that did not work in the north-east wind. When he opened his camphor-wood chest it filled his cabin with a suggestion of warm nights, of a still sea in which the reflection of the stars were comets rising from the deeps, of the figures of motionless palms drowsing with their heads above a beach. Well, that was over. But he had seen it. Time, now, to put it away, except as a private thought.

But as he packed away his silks and porcelain the image steadfastly quizzed him. That token of another order of things reclined luxuriously, as if asking him what he was going to do about it, though knowing he could give no answer. He put away everything but the image. He left that in the seat it had occupied all the voyage. He would not touch that yet. The voyage was not quite over. That idol was like an assurance of good. It might be the sign of a wisdom which understood all that he knew, and yet still could contemplate affairs with equanimity, though the sun and the lotus were far away. The image was completely foreign, as incongruous in a ship as he himself would be in a temple; yet you could believe that Putai Ho-shang was in a place his philosophy comprehended, though that place was chill and cold to him; that in his cheerful mind every extension of the mechanics of industrial progress was provided for, and all the important devices of the busy men who kept that machinery running. They would appear as simple to him as the acts of children. He would know all about it, and the end to which it was destined.

The face of the little cockney steward was at his elbow, with its sardonic smile. "Your tea, sir. We're nearly in."

"Where are we?"

"Just off Southend. Fine morning, sir. The pier's plain."

It certainly was a fine morning. The captain passed him on the deck. "Hullo, here we are again. Looks good, doesn't it? We've done nicely, too. She came along last night like a scalded cat, though there was just an off-chance we missed the tide. We're going up on top of it all right."



Was that Essex? No land in the East ever had a brighter sparkle. This place was not only alive but boisterous. It was as young as a stir. Their liner was slipping past a collier with a noise of brisk waters which was startling to one who had just left the quiet seclusion of a cabin. The river and its men were about their business. Great ships were moving quickly on a river that was spacious and resplendent. The very sunlight seemed dangerous with its swift gleaming in a lively breeze. That challenging shouting from a sailing barge was the voice of a young and vigorous land. To that land morning was native, and full tide pouring with bustling winds and floods of sudden light made merely the pulse of it. He got the impression that the globe was spinning almost too buoyantly. Gravesend was soon ahead of them, a touch of smoking rose. He dived below, at something like a speed proper to this newly discovered land, to see whether or not his baggage had gone out for the inspection of the Customs officers. It had gone. No time had been lost, and even while he looked round his cabin he saw from his port light that the liner was slowing. she had anchored.

No hurry. Nobody would be waiting for him, not at that hour of the morning. He idled outside. The long vista of the lower deck was vacant. Eh? As he looked aft a tall figure turned into it, leisurely and confident, glancing in curiosity about the ship, a figure that was familiar, yet changed by time. Was that his own boy?

The stranger strolled along and saw him. "Hullo, dad!" And then flushed, and was shy. "She's a topping ship, isn't she? I watched her coming up the river. She looked fine. Where's your cabin?"

They went into it. "The luggage is all set out on the starboard end of the ship. I came over in the tug with the officers. They tried to turn me out. What a jolly beautiful ship. And what's that funny smell, like spice? The two were with you." way a golden dr. ung at each other intently, asking questions,

forgetful of time. The boy, smiling and confident, like an assurance of good, regarded him cheerfully from a superior height.

"Here, my lad. Time we were off. There's a special train for the passengers. Come along, and talk afterwards."

The boy looked round the cabin curiously. "Here, is this yours?" He grinned, and picked up Putai Ho-shang. "What a comic little fellow! Is he yours? Righto!" He put Buddha in his pocket.

ON THE CHESIL BANK<sup>'</sup>  
1924

## ON THE CHESIL BANK

### I

THE Chesil Bank was new to me then, and it had no message. It was pleasing, but it was strange, though it was England. It was but a white-washed wall topped by a tamarisk hedge. Below the wall was a deserted ridge and beach of shingle, tawny and glowing, and a wide sea without a ship. The white wall, the pale and shimmering stones, and the bright sea were as far from my own interests as a West Indian cay.

A figure appeared in the distance, so unusual a blot on the shingle that I watched it two miles away. There was nothing else to do. It moved with briskness and determination, but appeared to be unconcerned with anything I could see on that strand. It came straight at me as though it knew I was there; and at length handed me a telegram. It was a smiling and rosy-cheeked little messenger from the post-office, three miles away. The child waited, like the eternal figure of Eros in a British uniform, as though it had been doing this, off and on, in some form or other, since the gods began to sport with the affairs of earth. Now what had the gods to say to me, *there and then*? "What's all this about?" I asked Eros. But he only smiled. I wondered who was in such a hurry to announce some good fortune, and opened the envelope. "Conrad is dead."

I stared at the messenger for a space, as though there must be something more to come. Then the messenger spoke: "Anything to go back?"

Anything to go back? No, nothing to go back. Somehow, life seems justified only by some proved friends and the achievements of good men who are still with us. Once we

were so assured of the opulence and spiritual vitality of mankind that the loss of a notable figure did not seem to leave us any the poorer. But to-day, when it happens, we feel a distinct diminution of our light. That has been dimmed of late years by lusty barbarians, and we look now to the few manifestly superior minds in our midst to keep our faith in humanity sustained. The certainty that Joseph Conrad was somewhere in Kent was an assurance and a solace in years that have not been easily borne.

Yet I cannot pretend to intimacy with him, nor to complete absorption in his work. There was something in him not to be clearly discerned. It was sought in his books with curiosity, but it did not appear to be there. The man was only partly seen, as through a veil. Sometimes his face peered through the filmy obscurity, massively, in still and overlooking scrutiny, his eyes remote but intent, kindly but dangerous, a face in a seclusion one could approach but never enter. Most of us are aware, of course, that we are secluded, and that our friends can never find out where we are. We wish they could. It is not a joy to us that, in the nature of things, we must be alone. But Conrad, perhaps, was more accustomed to exile and a solitary watch under the stars. Occasionally he would vouchsafe a closer glimpse of himself, say a word to make one wonder what was coming, and then he would fade into his own place. He would say something of *Meddlers*, meaning you and me, meaning all those Englishmen who, for example, are restive under the constraint of foolish men and statutes and plainly show it. He would exclaim *Humanitarians* in a way that implied, merely implied, that pitiful men are a nuisance. My own guess is that he desired to take part in English affairs, for he had strong antipathies, but that he repressed himself, doubting his right to—well, to meddle. Perhaps it is as ~~well~~ he kept out. He would have proved a formidable

But mainly he was silent about the affairs that prejudiced of the English, giving no more than a ironic glance. Or he would, when we

talked with emphasis about our national concerns, make an enigmatic gesture. He was an aristocrat. Yet what does that mean? Of course he was. Aristocrat and democrat are tokens that to-day look much alike, and appear to have no relevance even to a money-lender. We may throw them away. Everybody has forgotten what they mean.

I suppose it is about twenty years ago since I began to read *Conrad*. I knew of him, but mistrusted the evidence of the critics. The literature of the sea did not interest me, for I had had some experience with that rollicking stuff; the stories which, we are told, have something called "tang" in them, the stories that represent seamen as good-natured imbeciles, with a violent bully here and there among them altogether too ingenious and foul-mouthed for comfort. Hearty yarns! But we happen to know several seamen, and a few ships. However, one day, in a hurry for a train, I snatched up the *Nigger*, and began it in the cab on the way to Euston. That was a great surprise. The *Narcissus* was certainly the kind of craft which made fast in the South-West India Dock; and old man Singleton was the embodiment of the virtues and faults of a race of mariners which had all but gone in the year in which I read the book. Singleton was of the clippers. I had known some of those men, and I recognised Singleton at once. This novelist had made a picture of a type of British seaman which, but for his genius, would have been lost to us and forgotten.

There could be no doubt about it. The *Nigger* was the thing itself, and I had never expected to see it. Next I read *Typhoon*; and the *Nan-Shan* and her men were exactly what even now you may meet any day somewhere east of Tower Hill, if you care to look, and know what to look for. I was not certain whether the critics knew it, but to me it was plain that this writer, who was a Pole, I was told, had added to the body of English literature witness to a period of British ships and seamen which otherwise would have passed as unmarked as the voyages of the men of Tyre and Sidon. Its very atmosphere was there. As for *Youth*, it is, without

doubt, one of the finest short narratives in the language, and there will never be again such a yarn of such a voyage in such a ship

Conrad told me that not seldom seamen wrote to him to say that they knew Singleton well, though "that was not his name. Of course they knew Singleton. The novelist was very pleased that he could say Singleton had been recognised. It was the kind of assurance he needed then. It is all very well for us to make a fuss now, but Conrad had given the public his best work years before he received from us any worthy signal. He was an extremely sensitive man, and shy and modest, and not so long ago he desired the word from Englishmen that his addition to our literature of the sea was just, and the kind that we approved. We were in no hurry to give it. I met him first in the company of Norman Douglas and Austin Harrison in the office of the *English Review* in its earlier days. Because I knew he was a noteworthy man and because he looked distinguished and a little haughty, and because only a few weeks before I had reviewed one of his books of the sea, I was nervous and merely looked on. Presently Douglas and Harrison began to talk of the affairs of their review. Conrad then came over, and stood beside me. He touched my arm, apparently as nervous as I was myself. "Thank you very much for what you said about my book. You do think I am genuine, don't you?"

I was then a journalist on the staff of a daily newspaper. I was at Sidney Street and elsewhere. But Conrad's first words to me gave me one of the shocks of my life. Here was a man whose work, however neglected by the public, was manifestly an admirable achievement. It would be living when much of what was being done in London, and many of the great men whose names were in the headlines daily, would be forgotten. It did not want much knowledge to divine that. And hardly a robust young writer who had a column to fill somewhere every other day but was assured of his place in the handsome scheme of things, and expected

one to know his work. Yet this man, who had *Youth* to his credit, and *Typhoon* and *Lord Jim*, touched the arm of his junior and was pleased to say, "You do think I am genuine, don't you?"

A remark of that kind might go far to wreck one's own career, if it sank properly in. Yet it is as well to point out that, though modest, Conrad could be quick enough in attack when folly or presumption was about. He was not the man to suffer gladly the more ruinous absurdities of his fellows. It was heartening to see that graciousness and diffidence suddenly go, and those dark eyes become lively at the naming of an arrogant crudity.

I must say there is one of the company of the *Narcissus* that I deplore. Conrad should never have shipped that man Donkin. He is not a man, but an unresolved dislike, a grave blot on a good book. Donkin does a little to spoil the voyage of the *Narcissus*, for Conrad imagined that he had shipped a Cockney; yet Donkin, whenever he speaks, distresses the ear of a Londoner. We do not know his dialect. I fear that Donkin may be, if examined, queer evidence of what was behind that veil which Conrad preferred to keep between himself and his readers.

Mr. Cunningham Graham, in his preface to Joseph Conrad's posthumous *Tales of Hearsay*, quotes with evident pleasure from one of the tales: "It requires a certain greatness of soul to interpret patriotism worthily—or else a sincerity of feeling denied to the vulgar refinement of modern thought which cannot understand the august simplicity of a sentiment proceeding from the very nature of things and men." *Vulgar refinement!* A shining epithet. And how it would be quoted with unction by one group of ardent patriots, who would cheerfully shoot another group, with admirable sincerity of feeling, because the patriotism of their opponents, just as sincere if less admirable, stood in their way! Patriotism doubtless is like true religion. It may be entirely an expression of faith, and so need not be reasonable. And we know who have true religion. We have it.



No matter 'There is a fountain in Marrakesh,' says Mr Cunningham Graham, "with a palm-tree near it, a gem of Moorish art, with tiles as iridescent as the scales upon a lizard's back. Written in Cufic characters, there is this legend 'Drink and admire. Read and admire, then return thanks to Allah who gives water to the thirsty and at long intervals sends us refreshment for the soul.' And we return thanks to Allah. There is that to go back

## II

When I return to a London suburb I think I shall try to cultivate something resembling one of the drains which occur here and there on the lower slopes of this Wessex moorland above the Chesil Bank. These ditches make our best horticultural efforts as vulgar as excessive begonias. The effect achieved by a ditch comes, apparently, without intent and labour. When a drain is constant over shelves of limestone from an upper spring, and then gathers into a shallow basin before losing itself in the porous desert near the sea, when that occurs in a narrowcombe with a southerly descent sheltered from the hard drive of westerly weather, then the still lower air is tropical, and English weeds flourish with an extravagance which hints at a fearful vitality suppressed by cultivation.

One such tinycombe is a short walk above the tamarisks and the white wall of the house. It is easy and even pleasant to carry thither those books some wilful editors consider that I ought to read, unluckily for the books and for them, because if I get well above the ditch, then the smell of thyme makes the synthetic odours of a modern novel, as from a dressing table, seem a little queer. No getting round that criticism. And if I stay by the ditch, then I waste all the morning standing about in that luxuriant tangle, as fascinated by it as the hover-flies appear to be. No good then to try to read a book. Foolish to expect the wit of recent prose to move like a dragon-fly, or a lyric to soar and poise like a red admiral. On a hot day, too, the smell of the water-

mint would make the inducement of *Mille Fleurs* seem very silly. Besides, one has first to get to the ditch. It is quite near, but the time one takes to reach it is ridiculous. The ditch lies on the other side of an old wall, which is built—or created, for the wall bears no evidence of design—of loose slabs of a limestone of the *Lias*.

That wall is the trouble. It is hard to get over it, and impossible to get round it. Most of it is hidden in a cataract of bramble, which pours headlong downhill. That bramble is itself a domain in its own right. I have discovered that it is an inhabited tunnel, and the waves of hooked branches form its roof. One morning a stoat, which was leaping about in a game that needs but one player, saw me coming, and dived into a lower door of the mass. Out of other doors, till then unknown, rabbits shot at once, as by magic. It was as though this earth could erupt all the life it needs, at any moment. I suspect these hills could do very well without us, and if Downing Street were to become permanently untenanted perhaps our island would not look any the worse, from one point of view.

A good length of the wall is exposed at one place. That part of it is, as an orderly mind would say, in need of repair. I hope it will never get it. It is an encouraging ruin. Slabs of limestone are scattered about the foot of a ruin of loose rock. They vary in colour. They may be a pale buff, or a bluish-grey. The surface of a slab is frequently water-worn, and then it is smooth and silky to the touch, and is lustrous. It looks warm and rich, as though the bones of earth had an unctuous marrow. A chance fragment makes the age of the tumuli on the hill-top as recent as yesterday, for it will be loaded with fossils, the relics of a sea in which the dinosaurs lived. The cross-sections of many nacreous shells give such a tablet of rock the appearance of being marked with shining hieroglyphics; there is reading matter for us! No wonder it takes some time to get over it, this wall. Lizards whisk into its crevices, the flickering of shadows where all is still.

Below the overturned wall is thecombe in which runs the

ditch There is a dark screen of stunted Scotch firs on the edge of its far side to keep the Channel gusts from spilling over The weeds below have no need to adjust themselves to the draughts They grow as they please Teasel and hemp-agrimony flourish into small trees Once you begin to climb upwards through that jungle out of its lower fringe of mint and fleabane—it is time a better name was found for that pleasant little yellow herb of the waste and damp lands—you feel that the heat of the sun is really a direct and incessant burning The air is humid, and strongly aromatic The growth in that hollow might be the work of a spell It does not move It seems theatrical and even a little threatening in its absolute quietude and stillness Some resolution is needed for an advance into it The pinkish indistinction of the crowns of hemp-agrimony rises above the cream plumes of the meadow-sweet, and though one knows of no attraction in its flower-heads, the butterflies do I suppose it gives them an upper platform in the light Out in the wind you may not see a butterfly all day, but here it is usual on a sunny morning to find a gathering of scores of tortoise-shells, peacocks, and red admirals I am not sure which of these insects is the most handsome, but I think whichever one of them happens to be arranging itself on the nearest crown, heliotropically, really presenting to the sun its coloured design, yet behaving—if I remain as still as the garden itself—as though it were doing its best to get into the right light for my benefit Well, it is for my benefit, as well as to my humiliation, because I realise that such a design, though worked to no useful purpose that I can guess, being in that respect inferior to my own designs, yet still might be considered superior to the art of my own well-directed efforts Though it may be all without purpose, while that assembly of useless living colours is winged and convulsive above the weeds, on a good morning, it seems a sort of idleness to be making the usual notes of a critic of books

## III

Some miles to the westward, between the horns of the land, there was a small ship. That sailing trawler seemed stuck in mid-air. It was a windless day. The sea had the same vague shine as the sky, without a line to separate them. From a house on an upper slope we had seen that vessel just about there most of the morning, a model raised in light over the top of a thorn bush perched on the edge of the cliff. The bush told us how little that ship had moved.

We had been watching her, straight ahead, in that luminous emptiness, as the sailor talked to us. It was an autumn holiday, and there was nothing else to do. That ship was the only variation in a familiar view. The sailor's own liner, of which he is master, was in dry-dock, not far away. The autumnal trance of the earth suggested that perennial peace had come. The colours of leaves and berries were of the golden age, and in the still shine their clusters and sprays were as fixed as the distant ship.

That night the log fire crackled with a little frost. The sailor rose, and kicked back a glowing lump that had tumbled out. While he was up he peered at the barometer. It was falling. He said nothing about that. He took his ease again and continued to be sardonic over his theme, the poverty of human observation.

"It's in a ship you notice it. My passengers see new things, but seldom wonder what and why. Then they get used to them and forget them. Perhaps that's a good job. It saves talk. When we're used to things we cease to notice them. I suppose that's why fools can keep merry and bright—they see the facts, which mean nothing to them; they don't have to worry about inferences. The eyes of most people do not take things in, but slide over them."

He had a little story to tell us about this. It came out of his last voyage.

"You see, we had a following wind, so our passengers must have thought there was no wind at all. Late one

middle-watch I had to put the ship about. The weather was warm, and some of the passengers had left their ports open. When the ship went round—we had picked up a call for help—a few of the cabins felt a draught, and a pretty strong one, too. I heard complaints about it later—one lady was quite annoyed, though I don't know what the draught and the sudden list of the ship did to her. No, I didn't ask. I wasn't feeling funny at the time. I didn't tell her or any of them why they were jolted and felt the wind. They could find out if they wanted to—but no, they had to be told by a deck steward. They didn't notice some lifeboats had been shifted. They only complained about a draught."

We challenged our visitor. But aren't seamen as bad, when they're ashore? What is the value of their trained observation then? Does their particular attention to the meanings of little facts help them to read the signs of the times? Come along, own up!

The sailor laughed. He owned up. We were all alike. "You know," he said, "sometimes when we look at a thing we do see a shade of difference about it. You know how it is. The thing is not quite as before. But we aren't very curious. It takes an earthquake to make some of us stop, and try to change our way of thinking. Our eyes tell us of change, but we pass on. Wont and habit are too strong. We see very well that a matter is not quite as it was. It questions our intelligence. But we don't try for an answer. No time for it. Perhaps the idea very nearly gets into our heads that we ought to do something about that, but not quite. And there's a reason for it. Everybody hates a check to smooth going. We dodge a doubt, if we can. We won't look at it twice just because it is a doubt. It might mean trouble for us. So we persuade ourselves there can't be any difference. Besides, if there were a sign of change, wouldn't other people have noticed it, too? Well, we look round, and see that nobody else is bothering. That's why a man hesitates about calling attention to what should be as obvious to other people as it is to him. So he

keeps his mouth shut. He doesn't want to make a fool of himself. It's jolly hard to believe that a fact out of the ordinary, something of special significance, has come our way, unless it makes a *fuss* that would raise the dead. Very likely it isn't poverty of observation so much as a humble heart; we call it lack of initiative."

The sailor leaned forward, and sniffed. "You've got a bit of apple wood on that fire," He was right. The old tree broke a limb in the last gale, we told him.

"There's another gale coming," he commented. "I can feel it. I know those Atlantic westerlies a bit better than I know myself."

By next morning the barometer had fallen still more. Our guest the master mariner helped us to furl and stow a tent, which was *slinging about to free itself in the garden*, trying to balloon away uphill. As we closed with the tent to hold it a squall sprang at it to get there first, and nearly had it. We were *slung about and thrashed with tent ropes and flying pegs*. The wind was an incredibly little and powerful body. You half expected to see it.

We got that job done. The sleeping land and placid sea had gone. The bushes were *shrieking in the gusts* and trying to uproot themselves. Seaward was a haze of spume, and out of that shimmering space we watched white crests advancing in state. Down below us the spray of an exploding comber occasionally towered. We gazed windward long enough to taste the salt.

"Something out there," said the sailor.

There was. Now I could make it out. A trawler caught in it? Or a foolish yachtsman, asking for it? I could only assume that such a craft, at sea in such weather, was in charge of men who knew more about it than I did.

"Why," I exclaimed, "she has no headsails. Only a reefed main."

The sailor beside me, frowning at the smudge on the waters, said he thought it was the ship we had noticed yesterday. We did not discuss that. It would have been

improper to point out to a seaman that a ship cannot work to windward without headsails, and that she was on a lee-shore. Her head pointed to a far cape, then invisible. No suspicion we had about that craft was named by either of us. She was making heavy weather of it. The seas were evidently huge, for now and again she vanished.

"She has bunting flying from that gaff," said the sailor.

Now I could see that, too, with my binoculars. My friend has remarkably good sight. It was a reddish flag, but otherwise indistinguishable. Is it likely that I would suggest to a seaman that it might be the Red Ensign, and upside down? I had never seen that signal of distress, though perhaps my friend had. He did not say he had. He said nothing. After he had given the ship out there strict scrutiny we went indoors. It was too rough to be outside. Of course, the coastguard would have seen at least as much as we had. While we were at lunch the seaman craned his head, looking sideways curiously out of the window, which rain was lashing, and said the ship had drifted a lot to leeward. The wind was whistling through the frame of the window.

My friend now showed a little alarm. "What the deuce are they doing? Have you got a telephone?"

I had not.

She can't get out of this with no headsails, he muttered.

"Very likely," I said, "she has a motor."

"She needs it," he said.

We went on with our lunch. There she was still out there, but smaller, and more to the north.

"Here," said the seaman, getting up, "if this goes on she'll fetch the rocks. Where's your coastguard station?"

Three miles away, he was told, and nearer to that vessel than we were. He sat down again. "Something wrong there," he said.

That evening a visitor came, in streaming oilskins.

"Hullo! You've been out of it," he said. "Down on the beach we've had quite a time with life-lines and the life-

boat. Did you see the lifeboat? A smack was caught between the capes when the wind got up. She couldn't reach outside because her headsails went, and then her motor was swamped. She went aground to the north. There won't be much of her left to-morrow, but we've got her men ashore."

## IV

There is no harbour on the curved sweep of this bank of shingle for many miles in either direction. The line of the beach in the north curves so imperceptibly that to the eye it looks straight; towards the southern end it sweeps round like the blade of a sickle, and is as sharp in the run. The five-fathom mark is close inshore, so the first line of breakers is direct upon the shingle. The usual weather, of course, is westerly; nearly always south of west. And in that direction I suppose the next land would be the Bahamas, but I have only local maps, and can lay no exact course to what landfall is in the eye of the wind. Anyhow, there is so much ocean between us and the next land that the waves come in, with any seaward breeze, in regular and massed attacks. They growl as they charge. In summer weather like this it is a cheerful noise, for they are only playing roughly. Then they break and make the shingle fly, with a roar; and a myriad little stones, as a wave draws them back, follow it with thin cries.

Both the sea and the coast look bare and barren. Terns in couples patrol up and down, and so close to me that I can see their black caps. Occasionally one will dive—two seconds under water—and it comes up with something which glitters for an instant. On the ridge of the shingle bank a little vegetation is recumbent, forming close mats and cushions, with sere stalks that quiver in the wind as though apprehensive of their footing. The sea appears even more infertile than the desert of stones. You feel that you and your book, and the terns which now and then find something which glitters, are all the intruding life there is. But some distance away there are a few boats drawn up high and dry; they



make good shelters to leeward of sun and wind, and they have a strong but pleasing smell. And at odd times, usually towards evening, a crew of six men will come along to get out one of the boats. She is launched down the slope on wooden rollers, in short runs. Half the crew go in her, and one of them throws a seine-net steadily overside. The other fellows take charge of the shore end of the seine. The boat goes round a considerable bight, and then lands the other end of the net. If you imagine that hauling that net and its floats, when any tide is running, is nothing but fun, the men will not object if you put on your weight. That way there is much to be learned.

The gradient of the shingle is steep, and when climbing it with a line in tow the feet slip back into the polished stones at every step. What has this to do, you ask, with a reader of books? Well, what does a bookman learn at his study table about life? Let him sail a boat now and then, or haul in a net, or herd cows, or dig clay, or weed a field instead of new novels, let him work, if not for a living, then just for a change. What does he imagine keeps London's chimneys smoking? Once I heard a rude fellow interrupt a famous political economist, who was deploring the sad ways of coal-miners. "If you," he said, "could keep warm in winter only by hewing your own coal out of the rock, you know very well you'd sooner buy a pair of dumb-bells."

The feet crunch and slip steadily, while the floats of the net seem to bob no nearer the shore. The weight comes with a rush just about when you feel it is better to read books than to handle seine-nets. There is a heaving and a slapping on the stones. To most of us, of course, fish is fish. There is only fish. Yet one haul of the net is almost sure to bring in forms that must be fishes but belong to the man we'd. They stick in the memory and must be exorcised there," he said, as we resolve, by putting names to them, all

That eventual trouble us

"Hullo! fish-markets. I enjoy even Billingsgate, though the beach we've pushed about there, early mornings, and its

rain of slobber is bad for neat raiment. One of the most beautiful and terrifying scenes on this earth is a fish-market of the tropics. When next you are in Tanjong Priok, do not forget, as you did last time, to go to its fish-market. But this English shingle beach, barren as its stones look, is a good substitute for the Tanjong when the seine-net is fruitful. For occasionally it is fruitful, though a deal of wet and heavy labour may be wasted on six mackerel and some squids. The fishermen have no use for the squids, nor have I, but they may be enjoyed. You need only look at them, for they are like odd Chinese shapes in polished and transparent quartz, illuminated from within by the principle of life. Life flushes each hyaline figure. And though, from one way of thinking, six mackerel are not so good as six thousand, yet from another they are just as good. A wonderful family, that of the mackerel! You no sooner begin to remember tunny, albacore, and bonito than you are translated to a distant sea. There is something else, too. We never see mackerel in London; or, for that matter, any other fish. We see only provender there. On the stones of this beach, when the red globe of the sun sits atop of the north-western headland, and the air grows bleak, a mackerel fresh from the sea might be a big fire-opal lost to the ocean's enchantment. Yes, you may feel a shudder of fear when overlooking the heaving pocket of the seine-net.

And how little one knows of such a gathering from the gardens of the dulse! A red gurnard, with its staring eyes of violet, and the violet margin to its pectorals, never suggests anything for the pot. Those steady eyes look at you with disconcerting interest. There are red mullet and grey, garfish like green snakes, horse mackerel, herring, plaice and dabs, and fry that might be leaping shavings of bright metal. The other afternoon a salmon came in with the rest, a very king, a resplendent silver torpedo of a fellow, who scattered the shingle before he was overcome. And now, because I have been warned that I may look for even stranger messengers from the world we do not know, I am

waiting for the opah, the *chimæra mirabilis*, the angel-fish, Darkie Charlie, and the oar-fish or sea-serpent

## v

That overcrowding of which we complain, saying first that our cities are much too great, and then blaming our officials because the buildings do not spread quickly enough, is something we really enjoy, I suppose. We could not live without the support of the multitude. We love to walk down Fleet Street, jostling each other on the inadequate sidewalks, pressed together between the motor buses and the shop fronts. We find the crowd, and keep with it on instinct. The fruits of solitude are astringent and we do not like them. Nothing else will explain why we would sooner sit uncomfortably with fifty strangers in a charabanc, for a journey through a land we cannot see, to a place which is exactly like the one from which we started, than stroll across country in peace at our own gait.

Yesterday I had to go to town again. It ought to have been a pleasure trip, because the town nearest to me is described on the posters, with coloured illustrations, as the kind of place for which men forsake even their London employment. When I remembered its many advertised attractions I felt almost glad that I was out of tobacco. At last I should see this notable pleasure resort, with its golden sands and its joyous throng. The change would be interesting, because nothing had happened in my neighbourhood for some time, except weather. True, the tamarisk perennials had begun to rust, and in the next field there was stubble instead of oats. But, except echoes from a few selected books, the only sounds at an isolated cottage had been the occasional mewing of the gulls and the mourning of the sea. I had an idea, too, that the wind as it came ashore was glad to find our keyholes, for it desired a local habitation and a voice. The voice of the wind, I noticed, was in keeping with the monody of the sea. It is rare for any stranger to pass this house, though some porpoises went by the other after-

noon. Just beyond a most individual sea-stock, which somehow is rooted and exalted on the wall at the foot of the garden, daring the light of the ocean, I saw the black forms of the little whales arch past, close in. And the other day a float, from one of the submarine nets of the days that were, drifted ashore, to have a word with me about old times. It was the only distinguished stranger on the beach.

The pleasure resort, therefore, I expected to restore me to a conscious existence. Not far from its station there is a magnificent hotel, with a glass veranda and palms, under which I saw men in golfing dress sitting in wicker-chairs and brooding appreciatively across a broad asphalted road to the gathering ground of the charabancs; and, just beyond the motor vehicles, multitudes of red and yellow and blue air-balloons were swaying aloft, though their attachment to earth was out of sight. I threaded the charabancs, pushed aside men in white ulsters who shouted at me that it was only two bob, and brought up against some iron rails. I leaned on them for support; they were providential. The beach was below; I mean that I suppose it was, for it all was out of sight except a pailful of it immediately under my eyes, which a child was treasuring. A man was beside the child in a canvas chair. How he got there it was impossible to see, but he looked worried about it, though resigned. Rank on rank of deck-chairs stood between him and the sea, all occupied by people reading newspapers, or asleep, or dead; the intermediate spaces were filled with children. The very sea was invaded. It was impossible to discern where it reached the land. The crowds went out to meet it. They slurred its margin. And on either side of that holiday-maker below me, for miles apparently, the deck-chairs extended and shut him in; the sea wall rose behind him. Would he starve to death? Nobody seemed to care. Nobody lowered a rope. When I left him he had fallen asleep, luckily; perhaps to dream of freedom.

Whoever that man was he was a voluntary prisoner. He must have sought it. If that had been the only beach on

that coast, the only view of the sea to be got in the neighbourhood, it would be fair to guess that he had gambled with his hour and had drawn a blank. Such an accident might happen to anybody, even in the desperate matter of catching the only train of the day, which one had hoped was late. Yet that will not explain his wretched position, because, whether he knew it or not, there is a beach not a great distance from where he was a prisoner on which could be lost the population of a city, but, as I happened to know, no life was there that morning except a few fishermen and some parties of sea-birds. Moreover, the views from that untenanted strand are incomparably finer and wider. It is possible to see from there what a desirable island we have. It is very far from being as overcrowded as we imagine.

Indeed, if the country about that imprisoned holiday-maker has a fault, it is because it remains much as it was when the folk who built its hut-circles and cromlechs occupied it, though I myself do not find that fault with it. For most of a long day on its uplands a traveller will see more tumult about him than warm and smoking homesteads. Within a morning's walk of that crowded holiday beach a fox dropped his rabbit, which he was carrying home, as I came round a prehistoric earthwork, and trotted off reluctantly, in broad daylight. He must have been greatly surprised to find a stranger was trespassing on his hill. On another morning we startled a weasel, which at that moment had worse than startled a short-tailed field-mouse. He was more reluctant to go than the fox, but he did retire into a tangle. Not for long, though. His tiny snake-like head was out in a few moments, inspecting us. Then he stole out to look for his abandoned dinner. He became very peevish when he could not find it, for we had hidden it, and explored all the ruts and tussocks in the neighbourhood in impulsive leaps and gallops. We had a leisureed view of his cream and chestnut figure, darting and writhing about a roadway which has long been obsolete. Once or twice he seemed as though he were on the point of attacking us.

The land about that holiday resort has been loved by many great artists. The men who first tried to convert the English barbarians to Christianity saw its fruitfulness and settled there; but you might suppose, in spite of its colour, the nobility of its form, and the wealth of its tradition, that there was something wrong with it, for if you keep away from the tarred roads which connect the towns, and that is easy enough, you are in the England that was before the coming of the machines. Its contrast with that near holiday beach where the golden strand is invisible through pleasure-seekers suggests that the machines have so disordered our minds that we shall never again feel happy in independent contact with the earth.

## VI

The breakers are towering to-day. They explode above the tops of the tamarisks, which are tormented by a south-wester. If a door is opened pandemonium enters the house. So I have been reading the poets when their subject is the sea. Byron when in a kindly mood once counselled the sea to "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll." Man, especially man the poet, with his intuitive understanding of the universe, is inclined to haughtiness. He is a conqueror. He feels that he is one with the powers that roll and are blue. When he is not haughty and sombre in the presence of these powers he includes them with those embracing thoughts which fondly gather in little children, fawns, and daisies. I do not speak with certain knowledge, but I should guess that any anthology of what poets have written about the sea must cause a mariner a little astonishment. Are they the waters he knows? Then he must be a rude and careless fellow. Now and then, when turning the leaves of the book, it may occur to him that perhaps the poet did not know what he was talking about. He may set out with "a wet sheet and a flowing sea, a wind that follows fast," and bound along at the rate of knots for some stanzas; but presently he is sure

to ask himself why with the wind in that quarter the good ship "leaves old England on the lee"

Yet that is a minor difficulty. We can see that a slip of that sort might happen even to a sailor who attempted poetry, especially when one remembers the exigencies of metre and rhyming. No, what would give the mariner most surprise would be the love the poets feel for the sea, their delight in it, their robust faith in its blueness and its rolling and in its beneficent and healing qualities. It might be a public garden, maintained by a highly capable gardener. I have a number of those special anthologies, and a re-reading of them helps me to understand why it is that the people who, as they say, love the sea, prefer to show their love only at certain favoured points of our coasts, and to leave most of the shore-line to the wind and the gulls. These anthologies are got together for their comfort. For the most part, the poems concern an ocean which can be enjoyably contemplated on a warm day, in choice company, with light thoughts hovering about, vague but gleaming, like the birds. We must have the moral support of society when loving the sea. What would happen if we were left alone with it? One lonely evening by its margin might be enough to scare most of us towards the comfort of the nearest railway station's lamps. There is but little suggestion of this, however, in the anthologies. They brave it out. *High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire*, or *The Sands of Dee*—such unexpected chill shadows may at times intervene, and change the look of the sea. The brightness goes. Yet only as the sun goes when a trifling cloud blows across its light and warmth. The waves soon sparkle once more according to their poetic wont, and the deep and dark blue ocean rolls on, the ships are brave and free, and jovial sailors look out on their world like happy dotards whose function it is to provide matter for our amusement. At the worst they saunter through Ratchiffe, as did the crew of the steamer *Bolivar*, 'drunk and raising Cain,' but maintaining even then, we see, their reputation for imbecility. If they survive

a dangerous voyage in a steamer which was only a pack of "rotten plates puttied up with tar," and meant to founder, their sailor-like protest shows merely in a riotous booze. "Euchred God Almighty's storm, bluffed the eternal sea!" So let us adjourn to a tavern.

We appear to be incorrigibly romantic. We prefer to give the reality any name but the one which shows we have surmised its nature. It is impolite in Malay society, and even unlucky at night, to mention the dreaded tiger by name. You must refer to him in an allusive and friendly way. With a maritime people the sea is lovely, and sailors are "salts" who provide some happy relief. It is curious, then, that sea-lovers should be so careful when encountering the object of their affection that they rarely do it except with the support of a multitude. What we mean is, I suppose, that we enjoy leisure when in the midst of our fellow-creatures, in a place where everything is done to prevent our coming under those shadows cast by matters which puzzle or distress us, and therefore should be ignored or misnamed.

The sea is such a shadow, whatever the light upon it. The soul of the sea, if it has one, is like that fabulous "soul of the war," something from which no joy can come by brooding upon it. The sea attracts me, I know. I should not enjoy an English holiday away from the coast, and I should be glad if some wise person could explain exactly why. I have felt the same attraction, though then it was more acute, in the aspect of a desolate village, which was under the ruthless eye of the enemy's guns. I did not want to go there, but I went. At sunset alone on a beach where there is nothing but sea and sky and the forsaken shore, the look of the running waters, their harsh and melancholy voices, and the bleak wind which shivers the very herbage, makes you feel that you are a homeless stranger. Is this your place? It does not look like it. If verses from the poets then come to your mind it is only in an ironic way. Absurd to apostrophise that scene! Much effect upon it loving it



would have Perhaps the mere effort encourages the fearful and doubting heart of man, and for that reason we may welcome the poets and the romanticists, who give us the sensation of conquerors, which is something towards the triumph of mind over matter

The romance of the sea, the sea that inspired exultant lyric and stately prose, the sea wonderful with the old clippers to which we have looked back wistfully, is not quite the sea, we are beginning to feel, that we used to picture Does that sea exist? It may be ungracious to question it at this moment, so soon after our recent rapture, sincerely felt, over the *Cutty Sark* Yet there it is We are living in an age of revolt We question much that once was never questioned Things must prove themselves anew What we used to value may be lumber, and must go if it is, even when it is lumber of the mind

As to the sea, it has no human attributes whatever, though it will absorb anything the poet will give it It is as alien as the stars, which are bright over lovers, but were just as friendly to Scott's little party when the blizzard stopped We may feel what we like when we witness, from a ship off Sumatra, a tropical sunset But the spectacle of the billows of the uplifted Western ocean, in a winter twilight, is enough to make a man feel that he ought to have a religion, yet that is only a confession of man's wondering and questioning mind There is more pertaining to man in a kitchen midden than in the spacious ocean when it most attracts us Man fronting the sea, the sea which is, inexplicably, both hostile and friendly to him because it knows nothing of his existence and his noble aims, is saddened and is driven to meet its impersonal indifference with fine phrases, that his sense of his worth and his dignity may be rehabilitated He knows it is absurd to pretend to any love for the sea

Then why does the sea attract us? For it does, even though we feel now that our lyrical exultation over its moods have been oddly irrelevant It attracted in the same

way the good seamen who were so ill-rewarded for their skill and endurance when making for us what is now the wistful memory of the clippers. They were ill-used, those men. We may make their times romantic in retrospective brooding, and with a sombre imagining of the soul of man fronting the hostile elements in heroic endurance. But it will not do. So much of that endurance was necessitated by facts which any sensible dog would have avoided once he knew what they were like. To live in such quarters, on such food, while doing such work, when there was no need for it, when so easily it could have been ordered otherwise, may afford matter for an Iliad, of we choose to ignore the critical intelligence, but we cannot get credit for common sense on the score of it. And that kind of sense should be the beginning of the literature of the sea, as of all literature.

Let us examine more cautiously, for example, that favourite book of the sea of ours the *Nigger*. Remember that the barque *Narcissus* was property, just as is a farm, and might never have been on her beam ends but for an eagerness for more money. Now consider the attitude of her master and his officers to their charge, as Conrad posed them for our approval; regard the fortitude and skill of the men in circumstances which Conrad pictures so vividly that we shrink as from a physical contact; and then observe Donkin, that Cockney guy set up for the contempt of all stout and virtuous lovers of duty; and own up! Is it just? Do we know Donkin the Cockney as at once we know Singleton, the old man of the sea? We know we do not. That sort of treatment ashore drove agricultural labourers to the penal settlements of Australia. These facts, so important in any examination of the problem of conduct—and that, we know, is what the *Nigger* is—are obscured by our admiration for Conrad's noble tribute to Singleton, and for his pictures of a ship fighting the Southern Ocean.

No doubt it would suit some shipowners if the sea could be accepted as a cheap and providential means of testing the fundamental quality of the souls of men; and obviously

some men would stand the test well. But beyond noting that this would ease the labours of the Recording Angel I can see nothing in its favour. There is a need in literature, as in politics, to clear the mind of cant. Men intrinsically may be of less importance than good ships and the august spectacle of the sea, but they ought not to be so to us.

But one could go on for a long time on such a subject as the sea in English literature if one named merely the books and the poems which to us seem to be right. There is, however, no need. One sea story comprehends them all, as all who know *Moby Dick* are aware. It is the greatest book in the language on ships and the sea, because it is more than that. For the White Whale, that mythical monster, is as elusive as the motive of a symphony of Beethoven's. Did the whale ever exist? There is the music to prove it. The harpooners followed it, a shadow among the stars. That is something like a whaling voyage, when the boats leave the seas to hurl a lance at the Great Bear. Other voyages must end, but the quest of Captain Ahab's ship is without end, and what should we expect of a craft whose master soliloquises like Macbeth? Outside the epistles of St. Paul, is there a sermon in any book which is like Father Mapple's to the folk in his chapel at New Bedford? The bearings taken by Captain Ahab to find his ship's position, to set, if he can, a right course for her, would bring his ship to a harbour no man has ever reached. And he did not reach it. Destiny sank him and his companions in the waste. Yet we know the high adventure of his phantom whaler continues in the hearts of men. That is where the *Pequod* sank.

Many years ago I was discussing the literature of the sea with a Fleet Street colleague, a clever and versatile man against whose easy enthusiasms experience had taught me to guard myself well. He began to talk of *Moby Dick*. Talk! He soon became incoherent. He swept aside all other books of the sea with a free, contemptuous gesture. There was only one book of the sea, and there never would be another.

Fathers to any place on earth if on their venture depended the vitality of the seed of such a book as that. The indeterminate wilderness of humanity flowers and is justified in its bibles, which carry in microcosm the fortunate future of mankind, or if there be no fortune for it in its future, then its tragic but godlike story.

If a reader of books desires to know the quality of his understanding of English prose, whether it is natural and proper, or whether his interest in it has been but suggested by the critics and the conventions of the more fashionable reading of his time, there is a positive test. Let him read the book by Herman Melville about a whale. If he does not like it he should not read it. As soon as imagination begins to sport with our language, then our words, that were familiar, become strange, their import seems different, you cannot see quite through them. They suggest something beyond. They seem a trifle mad. They break free from our rules and behave indecorously. They are transmuted from the solid currency into invalid hints and shadows with shifting lights and implications. They startle with suggestions of depths around us the existence of which we had not suspected. They hover too perilously near the horizon of sanity and proved things, beyond which we venture at our peril. They become alive and opalescent, and can be terrifying with the foreshadowing of powers outside the range of what has been explored and is understood. As in all great art, something is suggested in Melville's book that is above and greater than the matter of the story. Upon the figures in Melville's drama and their circumstances there fall lights and glooms from what is ulterior, tremendous, and undivulged. Through the design made by the voyage of the *Pequod* there is determined, as by chance, a purpose for which her men did not sign, and which is not in her charter.

But if we wish to criticise the book, then we might as well try to pull to pieces the precession of the equinoxes. The book defies the literary critics who are not used to

sperm-whales. While reading *Moby Dick* you often feel that the author is possessed, that what he is doing is dictated by something not himself which compels him to use our accepted symbols with obliquity. You fear, now and then, that the sad and steady eye of the Ancient Mariner is on the point of flaring into a mania that may prophesy or rave. His words go to the limit of their hold on the polite and reasonable. Yet they do not break loose. It is possible that we have not sufficient intelligence to rise to the height at which Melville was considered to be mad. After all, what is common sense? The commonest sense, Thoreau tells us, is that of men asleep, which they express by snoring; and we know that we ourselves might be thought a little queer if we went beyond the plain and verifiable noises in everybody's language.

But who has resolved poetry into its elements? Who knows what *Christabel* means? And who know why a book, which was neglected for seventy years, should be accepted to-day as though light had only just come through it? I suppose our thoughts have veered. Certainly of late years much has happened to change them; and when our thoughts change, then the apparitions change about us. We change our thoughts and bring about another world. We see even in *Moby Dick* what was invisible to the people to whom the book first was given. On a winter's night, only a year or two ago, I was intrigued into a drawing-room in a London suburb to hear a group of neighbours, who were men of commerce, discuss this book of Melville's. They did so with animation and the symptoms of wonder. It could not have happened before the war. Was some unseen door now open? Were we in communication with influences that had been unknown to us? I was greatly surprised, for I knew well enough that I and they would not have been found there, ten years before, discussing such a book. The polite discussion of accepted books is all very well; but this book was dangerous. One ought not, without due consideration, to set out at night from a suburban villa to hunt a

shadowy power in the sky Heaven alone knows where that may lead us And my wonder was the greater when a shy stranger there, who looked more like a bank manager than a South Sea whaler, confessed during the discussion, quite casually, that Melville's book reminded him of Macbeth Of course! Those knocks on the castle door! That was the very thought which had struck me I looked at the man with awe, as though I was in the wake of the White Whale itself I left that gathering much too late of a winter's night for comfort, and a blizzard struck us But what is a blizzard at midnight to a wayfarer who has just had happy confirmation, an unexpected signal amid the bewildering chaos and disasters of his time and culture, that he is in the dawn of another age, and that other watchers of the sky know of more light?

## vii

The home-sick palm that was dying on the hotel veranda touched with a dry finger the coat sleeve of the man next to me He picked up the leaf and idly rolled it like a cigarette 'Pleasant here, isn't it?' he said His eyes wandered kindly round the assembly of wicker-chairs in that glass-house We were nearest to the door, and could feel what little air was stirring A woman remarkable because the new crimson of her lips failed to restore youth to the seamed pallor of her face, and who wore a necklace of great lumps of amber, was giving chocolates to a spaniel at the next table

'Rum little face that dog's got,' said the man

'Wonder what the next fad in dogs for ladies will be That one can hardly breathe, and can't walk'

He was amused, and touched his fair hair very lightly, for it was as accurately paraded as—I merely guess—his own platoon would be His moustache was neat His chin was in good taste His eyes went seaward, where turquoise space faded into a haze between two vague headlands, and at once he became alert and sat upright He lifted his

binoculars and scanned the Channel. "They're destroyers out there, aren't they?" he asked, as interested as though he hoped that truth had appeared in the offing. He carefully focused his glasses. "And that's a Dreadnought. I'm sure." Yes, they seemed to be destroyers, and the other a battle-cruiser.

The saturnine yachtsman, the best bridge-player in the hotel, in white duck trousers and a reefer jacket, whose yacht had not yet arrived, joined us. He said gravely, as though confirming news that was important, but till he spoke was improbable, that they were destroyers and a battle-cruiser. They were, he remarked, of the latest type of destroyer. The French had nothing so good.

The lady with the dark lips left her dog and came to look seaward. "Are they really warships? How thrilling! What are they doing?"

We did not tell her. We did not know. But that cheerful and irrepressible fellow, who often intrudes an unfortunate comment which is always followed by his own laughter, though we never speak to him, blithely answered the lady. "What are they doing? Wasting taxes," he said, and laughed, of course.

The yachtsman whose ship was late turned wearily and left us, the young man with the disciplined hair wound the strap round his glasses as though he had heard nothing, and the lady went to stop the noise her dog was making, for the old fellow sitting with his nurse was glaring malignantly at the spaniel over his shoulder.

"Only thing against this place is, one can't get any golf," my young friend complained, and began to hum a tune that was popular about the bandstand. He continued to look out to sea; his eyes avoided the asphalted promenade where the charabancs assembled. The beach was out of sight, but it must have been crowded, for a multitude of air-balloons swayed above it. Shrill far-off cries came from there. "Sounds as if the sea-serpent were among the girls," said the young man. "Let's go and look."

We strolled over. We leaned on the iron rails of the concrete wall and looked down on the holiday-makers. The beach was sunk beneath deck-chairs and recumbent forms. The incoming tide was compressing the multitude against the sea-wall, and two more pleasure-seekers could have found no place down there.

"That nipper—that one in the red varnished breeches—he seems to have all the sand there is." My friend pointed to a child with a toy bucket beneath. "Doesn't look too golden, does it?"

Our eyes roved. "I say, look at this fellow," pleaded my companion, and nudged me. A man stood near us leaning on the rail. He was surveying the people from the cities taking their pleasure. It was a lumpy figure, in rough clothes, in old velveteen riding-breeches, and leggings that were almost globular. His cap, perched well forward on a tousled black head, gave him a look of crafty loutishness. His jowl was purplish and enormous, and that morning's razor had polished it. The light actually glinted on the health of that broad mask, which was as solid and placid as that of an animal.

'Pretty bovine, that fellow. Genuine bit of local clay all right,' my friend whispered. "Shouldn't like to upset him, though. Look at his blessed arms!"

But I had, when they were bare. They are chestnut in colour, and swell in an extraordinary way when they haul on a seine-net or a bogged wagon.

'If I knew how long it would take him to think about it I'd ask him what he thinks of this crowd. Anyhow, the poor fellow wouldn't last five minutes in the place where these people come from.' Some joyous screams from the

water appeared to confirm this. Perhaps the quick wits for the merry folk below had divined even our thoughts. The bovine face stared on, its chin projecting a pipe. "He looks healthy enough," commented my friend, "but space face has got into his system. Do you think he has a opinion about anything? What makes him move



about?" At that moment the man slowly raised his bulk, looked steadily at his pipe for some moments, then peered seawards, and went away, without a glance at us.

I saw him again some miles from the hotel, where he stood at the end of a path that led up to his farm, beside a patch of lusty hogweed which was as tall as himself. He nodded, and grinned.

"Had enough of that place? I been back some time. Thought the wind was shifting." He glanced up at the cirrus with his piggy eyes. "Ought be to mackerel in the bay this evening. Think I can smell 'em. Water looks like mackerel. . . . Are you passing Jimmy Higgs? Tell him to get the crew. Pretty good catch, unless I'm mistaken, and we'll be the first boat.

"I'll be along by the time you're ready," he said, turning away. "Got the cows to see to now." He jerked his thumb towards the distant holiday-makers. "Nothing for them to eat unless we see to it."

## VIII

The farmhouse with its outbuildings, all built of a mellowed limestone, from a little distance could have been imagined as an exposure of the bare bones of the hillside. The group of grey structures was formless till the sun burned through the mist that morning and touched the lichened roof of the house into a rectangle of orange light. That was the sign that it was a human habitation, for weathered buttresses and grey hummocks of rock are not infrequent on the slope above our walled garden by the shingle. The gaunt ribs of the earth show through its thin turf and shaggy tufts of furze and bracken. It surprises a visitor that England should look so abandoned and desolate, yet so bright and tranquil.

But desolation is not the same as darkness. The life on those steep and barren uplands is abundant; and, though useless, it evidently springs from the original fount, which seems to be full as at the beginning. Nothing we discovered,

as we climbed to the moor, had been withheld from the bracken because it is an unprofitable crop. It was a maze, too, of the dry tracts of wild creatures, as though it were a busy metropolis, and its citizens were all absent for the day, which now was radiant. The furze made vivid islands of new green and gold in wide lakes of purple, for the heather was in bloom, and suggested that we have yet to learn the full meaning of profit. It was tough as well as effulgent, and hinted of staple crops for uses beyond any that figured in the news of the day. Those crops are not quoted. Perhaps we know less about markets than we thought. The morning was so good that one felt nonsensical.

Yet, as the visitor from London said to me "What markets are you talking about? Don't be absurd. And what good would they be to us if we knew them?" He wanted no transcendental nonsense, which was only a lazy trick to escape from facts. Bracken and furze, in modern society, were enemies to be abolished. They were in the way. They ought to be mutton and butter. He regarded any other view of them as fantastic, which had no validity except to the sentimental. "Of course," he said, pausing, as we reached the height, at the surprise of broad valleys and hills beyond, "I enjoy this as much as you do. It's a fine day, so far—though something is working up in the south-west by the look of it." He swept an arm of happy understanding over the peace and splendour of the earth. "All that is lovely merely because we have agreed to call it so. That's its full title to loveliness. It does not exist in its own right. When we choose to change it into something different, we shall. That right belongs to us. The dyes of those flowers are reducible to formulas, and the shapes of those hills came of chance upheaval, the textures of the rocks, and the weather. We call the colours lovely and the forms of the hills noble. That is our view of it, was they are promoted to the titles we give them." We strode space the gods of the earth to which we could give any shape at once. It certainly was a fine day.

He thought, indeed, this visitor, that the fact that we enjoyed a fine day was its sole justification. As to the gold of the furze, those bushes would as soon see us perish of exposure under their thorns as exhilarate us with their new gold. And we could please ourselves about it. It did not matter to the furze bushes whether we perished or admired. And those cushions of rosy heath, pendent in half-circles over a scar in the ground where white flints were set in buff-coloured earth which seemed self-luminous, what were they but an æsthetic arrangement of our own? In themselves they were nothing. They were not related to anything, except to what was in our own minds. We made them rational because we preferred them so. But the moor was not anything in reason at all. Perhaps that lovely arrangement had never been noticed before, and the chance brush-work of the next storm might obliterate the beautiful irrelevancy for ever. Then where would it be?

I had no answer to make. There is no answer to be made that is valid for all of us. The arrangement of rose, white, and buff continued its casual appeal, without any additional emphasis to assist its dumb case. The sun was warm. The air, when it stirred, smelt of herbs. The critic's little daughter, who might have been listening to her seniors giving this world the reasons for its existence, she, too, made no sign. She was merely unquestionably bright and good, like the rose and gold, and smiled like the sun, without a word.

Possibly the critic was right. There was no sense in it all. Only our own well-being assured us the moorland was good; the coincidence was happy. "Wait and see what the place is like when the weather changes," he said.

It changed. A fog drifted in from the sea. One hill-slope would be shining and its neighbour expunged. The time came when all the distant view had dissolved. The light went out of the colours. As we tried to find our way home in the growing mirk it was noticeable that there were more thorns than gold to the furze. The tracks confused us. They

were not made by creatures having our rational impulses. They led nowhere. As we came round an old tumulus an object moved ahead of us. It vanished, unrecognised, in the mist. It left behind a warm but dead rabbit. We were sorry to have missed a sight of that fox.

Its victim had only just died. The rabbit's moist eye looked up at us apparently in bright understanding. We examined it, admired its soft fur, and then we left it, in an unattractive huddle, on the turf. 'We could continue our little discussion on nature,' he said, 'with that murdered rabbit as a text, couldn't we? Not so pretty as the purple heather?' He smiled while waiting for my answer.

I looked back at the victim. The critic's little daughter was stooping over it, tenderly composing bunny in comfort under the shelter of a bush. Her compassionate figure was all I could see in the fog behind us.

## IX

What particularly attracted me this autumn morning, was a blade of grass under the tamarisk hedge. There are not many such mornings, even in the best of years. It was as though the earth were trying to restore one's faith completely for the winter, so that the soul should hibernate in security and repose—live through hard times as it were on the bounty of this gift of fat. The branches of the tamarisk, usually troubled, for they face the Atlantic, were in complete repose. Their green feathers were on young stems of shining coral. The sea was as placid as a lower sky. On some days here, even a modern destroyer making for shelter looks a poor little thing, utterly insignificant, an item of pathetic flotsam in a world which treats it with violent derision, indeed, the treatment is greatly worse than that, for it comes obviously of magnificent indifference to man, the disturber and destroyer. It is as much as you can do to wasep your glasses fixed in concern on that warship, which space and theft's cruelly expunged. Our English seas are at once as is fall in the winds of doctrine.

on this morning a sheldrake, diving about in five

fathoms just off shore, was more noticeable than a fleet of ships would be on other days. When he dived he sent rings over the blue glass. The sea was like that. The distant cliffs were only something about which you were quite sure, yet but faintly remembered. It was easy to believe news had arrived that morning which we should all be glad to hear, and that somehow the sheldrake had heard the word already. And there was that blade of grass under the tamarisk. There were many blades of grass there, of course, but this one stood out. It topped the rest. It was arched above its fellows. Its blade, of bluish-green, was set with minute beads of dew, and the angle of the sunlight was lucky. The blade was iridescent. It glittered with many minute suns. It flashed at times in a way to which grass has no right, and the flashes were of ruby and emerald. You may search up and down Bond Street with the money ready in your pocket, and you will not find anything so good. Yet I could not collect my treasure. I had to leave it where I found it. Is treasure always like that?

I abandoned it, feeling much more confident and refreshed than ever I do when a book confirms, with impregnable logic, some of my private prejudices, and sat on a hummock of thyme to watch the sheldrake. Then a man of letters came and sat beside me. I did not tell him about my feast of grass. What would have been the good? I did not recall that that kind of refreshment is down in any book; for Nebuchadnezzar's attempt on grass, we may recall, was somewhat different. We began, instead, to talk of Bond Street, or, rather, of literary criticism, about which I know nothing but my prejudices; and they, possibly, were found somewhere in the neighbourhood of that street and therefore have no relationship to the morning dew. I noticed that the critic himself seemed unsettled that morning, though whether the blue of the sky had got into his head to change the Oxford blue, or whether he, too, had been feeding on honey-dew, it is not for me to say. One should never, except with a full sense of the awful implication, call another person mad; for the improvident beauty of the world, placed where

we either miss it or destroy it, might serve as evidence of the madness of God. It is possible that we may even lightly blaspheme when we call a strange fellow a little mad. Nevertheless, the critic's words at least startled me. He was tying a knot in a stalk of thrift, and he remarked casually "It seems to me you can bring all art down to one test." He gave me that test, which is a passage beginning, "Consider the lilies of the field."

Perhaps we had better not. Perhaps a consideration which began with a lily might tarnish, if it were allowed, more than the glory of wise kings. To begin with such a challenge to one's opinions is unwise, because it might not allow the consequent argument a chance to find approval for the things we most admire. But evidently those lilies of the field were of importance to the commentator who once begged his fellow-men to consider them, or objects so common by the wayside could not have been marked by him with favour. He so exalted those common weeds that they diminished, though that was not their aim, the cherished national tradition of a great monarch. Is that an approach to a just criticism of art? It may be so. After that accidental discovery of the wasted treasure behind me it was impossible to reject at once so disastrous a theory. I am almost prepared to believe there may be something in it. It is possible that scientific critics, who judge by fixed criteria of analysis and comparison, and who are annoyed as much by a show of life in a book as an anatomist would be if the corpse moved under his knife, had better regard it, unless, like the girl in melodrama, they would prefer to take the wrong turning. I heard a farmer the other day calling this a bad year. But what did he want? If he had climbed out of his fields to where the young green and gold of the furze was among the purple heather he would have seen that the fount of life was just as good as it ever was.

Seaward there is only light, and the smoke of a distant steamer low down. The westerly gales have ceased at last, as if there were no more reason to bring ships home to a

land that not long ago were populous, but now is not. The smoke of that steamer in the south-west remains as a dark blur, the slowly fading memory of a busy past, long after she must have lifted another landmark. In all the wide world, from the beach as it is to-day, the distant trace of smoke is the only sign of human activity.

In the frail shine of this autumn morning, reminiscent and tranquil, the broad ridge of shingle, miles long, the result of centuries of storms, appears unsubstantial. There are, on its summit and terraces, mirages of blue pools and lakes where no water can be. No breakers explode on it to-day. The sea is a mirror. The high downs behind the shingle that have been dark with an antiquity of heather, tumuli, and frowning weather are happily released to the sky, and are buoyant as though raised by an inner glow.

Not many days in the year are like this. Two or three? And the resemblance of our own coast to a southern shore is now remarkable. The old wall of the steading behind the beach is not merely whitewashed. That wall's brightness this morning might be, like moonshine, evidence of what once stood there. Only the dark feathers of tamarisk above it pretend to substance, and they are drowsy after the buffeting of a wild summer, and bend asleep over the wall. That secluded place has grown familiar to me, but on a day like this, with the strong smell of decaying sea litter—long cables of fucus have been laid along the shingle by continual hard weather—and my footsteps the only sound, I approach that wall as if it were an undiscovered secret on an unfrequented strand of the Tortugas. No need to go out of England for adventure. Adventure is never anywhere unless we make it. Chance releases it; some unexpected incidence of little things. The trouble is to know it in time, when we see it. If we are not ready for it then it is not there.

This morning I had the feeling that I was much nearer that fellow in the round barrow above the steading, whoever he used to be, than ever I felt on a glum day. Such autumn light as this is mocking. When the weather is overcast the

tumulus is deeply sundered by time, but a September sun makes yesterday of it. Almost hidden in the figwort and hemp-agrimony of a dry ditch behind the shingle is a rusty globe, a dead mine of the war, and from an embankment above it I picked out a flint arrow-head or rather, to-day's odd and revealing shine betrayed it to me there. But in the gay and mocking light of such a morning both weapons belonged to the same time in man's short history. They were used in the same war. They will be separate from us, and both will become equally ancient when we are of another mind and temper. When will that be? We may have to maintain ourselves in such a light as this, regardless of the weather.

For what this oblique light suggests is that there is a life and a tendency which goes on outside our own, and is indifferent to our most important crises. It is not affected by them. No doubt it acts upon us, but we do not often surmise that. It is lusty and valid, and we may suppose that it knows exactly what it is about. We may be too proud in our confidence that no other life has a more authentic word about its destiny than has been given to us. At sunrise to-day, on the high ridge of the shingle which rose between me and the sea, six herons stood motionless in a row, like immense figures of bronze. They were gigantic and ominous in that light. They stood in another world. They were like a warning of what once was, and could be again, huge and threatening magnified out of all resemblance to birds, legendary figures which closed vast gulfs of time at a glance and put the familiar shingle in another geological epoch. When they rose and slowly beat the air with concave pinions I thought very Heaven was undulating. With those grotesque black monsters shaking the sky, it looked as though man had not yet arrived. Anyhow, he was a mere circumstance—he could come and go—but a life not his persisted and was in closer accord with whatever power it is that has no need to reckon time and space, but alters seas and continents at leisure.



A SPANISH JOURNEY  
1933

## A SPANISH JOURNEY

### SPRING SONG

THOUGH it was May, the earth was cold. It was saturated with January, and the sap could not rise. My garden was unfrequented because every rosette of leaves, which had promised as long ago as March to flourish into tall personality, was still limp and flat. They had been counted, and watched, but were still waiting the warm incitement to have a heart. Perhaps I had looked at them all too often and hopefully. Summer was going to be as tardy as the signs of golden abundance moving at last in the late bleak fields of war. The wind was not in the south; in fact, it was north of west, with an occasional reminder in it of polar snows as unfriendly as the usual trade statistics.

There was also, that morning, a voice at the telephone, an authoritative voice, yet reproachful, as though sadly expecting only the accustomed answer to its bright suggestion of good; it was the voice of a busy editor.

"No," I answered it. "I can't. I won't."

What! The far voice at once enlarged close and loud with indignation. It was as though the editor had burst into the room to sack me.

This, I heard very distinctly, was the limit. Here was a matter of public duty. It could not be refused. Did I know what I was talking about? This Economic Conference was our Last Chance, as near as he could see it. And how did I like the look of that? I murmured that I liked it no better than the Thin Edge of the Wedge; for what I really lacked was the courage to hang up the receiver and go away. The editor then tried persuasion. I wouldn't have to go far to

this conference he assured me. It was being held in the Geological Museum, Jermyn Street.

Palaontology in a northerly wind? I rang off. That editor was trying to be funny. He was sniggering because he knew his suit was not going well. That was why I did not at once answer the telephone when it called again, almost immediately after the folly about a museum. I knew what the ring meant. He was pursuing me, and I was sure to be caught. Editors never give up.

Something else had happened too. A visitor had arrived, and I liked the look of her. She could be more attractive, more persuasive than any great daily newspaper, whatever its circulation. This visitor had but just learned to walk, if her hand was held lightly, and she had come to show me how walking could be done. She was rosy through a new joy in this fine life, but too young to be proud. It was done very well, too, this walking, only she moved with the high thrusting step of a thoroughbred, for her poise was both conscious and delicate.

The telephone continued to ring. But my visitor offered me her hand, sure I was the man to take it, and at once I claimed the right to escort her in her first walk down the garden. Out there, the imperative bell could not be heard. I noticed now that a little of the sun was getting through. The borders were not so grey and shabby as I had supposed. Some colours were bright which I'll swear had not been there five minutes ago. Good luck seemed nearer than before. Any pleasant thing might happen. My lady paused in her little promenade, and held me, she stooped in wonder over a dandelion in the grass. That noxious weed did not announce neglect. I did not grub it up, but at leisure admired it with my guest. How lovely is the rayed disc of a dandelion, when seen in the right way! What more could a garden do for me?

It was then that a call came for my immediate return to the house. There was no time for any more delicate walking, so I had to carry my guest indoors. The telephone receiver

was handed to me gravely; it could not be avoided, this. At first, though intent, I did not understand. I fancied the voice at the other end was mistaken. It supposed it was addressing another man; that man, too, was to go to Spain, forthwith, whoever he was. Wrong number?

## CLOUD OVER TARSISH

Some years ago I was bound east in the Mediterranean, for the first time. Our ship was not long through the Pillars. To the north, a loom was distant in an evening sky. That meant the Sierra Nevada and the Alhambra, though the coast of Spain was unseen. The business of the ship, for some moments, was forgotten by me.

Granada is one of the great names. I expected, of course, being young, to go there, some day, and watched the apparition in the north till it faded in distance and twilight. Since then I have seen that sign again in the distance, and more than once. It has had another meaning. It was a reminder to an older man that even if the world were small enough, and all its embrasures for outlook were within easy stroll, some might be omitted.

Because Spain, for most Europeans, is much what it must have been when Andalusia was Tarsish to the ancients. It is aside from the busy continental tracks. All roads do not lead to Madrid; that city has ceased to be the capital of a great Empire. The lurid glow from the savage hammering out of new forms of human society does not glare its night sky, as over Rome, Moscow, and Berlin. We are not compelled to look to Madrid in nervous expectation. We are satisfied that it is on the map, but it is not so often in the news; we hear more often of Tokyo. Spain was outside our Great War; and as she does not have to help pay for it very likely she is less concerned with the economic consequences of the peace than the heroes. If there are bull-fights in Spain, yet pilgrims do not set their faces to Seville as often as they do to Florence.

Granada, as a solitary cloud over the sea in the north, notable only because its orange light was high and bright while the waters were dusk when the sun had set, was not more distant and apart—for our ship held to her divergent course, with other interests—than that telephonic voice which surprised me with a whisper of Spain.

Spain? The whisper was inviting. I was asked to depart at once. The whisper held my attention like that cloud in the north, in the past, when our ship held on, for mirages had nothing to do with our ship. The voice invited me off my course away from the interest of London. To leave all, and go to Granada. I was given hardly time to consider and reject an invitation to visit what to me was only a romantic illusion. Here was London and duty, and that Conference! Excitement was already beginning in London over this new attempt to save the triumphs of industrial civilization from adding to the beauty of the hanging gardens of Babylon. How leave all that?

Then the telephone, very artfully, mentioned Toledo. The man at the other end was a sorcerer. Yet though Toledo may be as good as its legend, what is it when the smoke from our factory stacks is so thin, even extinct in many of them, and the wheels in the mills are despairingly sluggish? One ought to stand by one's own dying factory stacks, like a gentleman? But the telephone was so convincing that soon it left me nothing except to find an argument for doing what I wanted to do. Would Toledo prove happier than the contemplation of fossil economic opinions in a London museum? I remembered helpfully, among other things likely to make running away seem virtuous, that once, after an introduction to an American gentleman of leisure and learning—a man well beyond the age for new ideas and experimental adventuring—I was told that one day he was pondering a picture by El Greco though he was familiar with the works of the masters. Presently a spirit moved him and he began to learn Spanish and when he knew it he went to Toledo. Thereupon I myself began to

ponder. Now, would a body of international experts, gathered together to diagnose the sickness of Money, find what was wrong with it? Need one wait outside the door of the consulting-room, expectant of happy news? Money, arise, take up thy bed and walk! Possibly some days could be stolen for Toledo, before men had learned to distinguish sense from nonsense, where money is concerned. I might be back just in time, if I hurried.

## VICTORIA TO AMIENS

I did not hurry, except when packing a bag. Strangely, the need for a Conference, to discover what is wrong with our cash, did not seem so urgent at Victoria Station. The morning was sunny. We were going to Cadiz. Our train, the Golden Arrow, was less desolate than a bankrupt factory. Its restful upholstery and inlaid maple and mahogany were more like the just reward for success than a reminder of hard times. When a train journey is not an interlude to be stoically endured, but a transference so luxurious that it is a benefit, then through the flying windows the world does not appear too bad. Speed and a soft seat induce a drowsy contemplation of inferior matters passing outside.

Robin, sitting opposite, was staring at fleeting England as gravely and aloofly as Buddha at transitory wrack and woe; it was not his woe. He was, I think, falling asleep. Felix steadily corrected the proofs of his next book, absently overloading an ashtray with cigarette stubs the while; and whenever his monocle fell from his eye once more it knocked the ash on his waistcoat a ledge or two lower down. Fabian was reading; he apologetically retired our parade of tumblers two paces to the rear to make room on the table for his book, when he rested it there for a change.

The channel crossing was almost over; Calais was surprisingly near before two of us knew where to find the ship's bar; we wanted to warn the rest of the party. Step lively there! Boys, Calais again!

It appeared as attractive and innocent, in the distance, as if some of us did not know it. It was Calais in another dimension. Fabian smiled at it moodily, on the last occasion, he said, he stumped ashore there with a gun. Yet was that really Calais? I found myself staring at the shining waters and the delicate colours in disbelief as well as pleasure. The scarf of a young lady, standing at the bulwarks near us, fluttered in the breeze. Some belated confetti blew out of it.

Her laughter put us in another day. Very certainly that happy girl did not see there an escorting destroyer plunging to starboard of us, a smudge wiped by a gale, an occasional burst of foam to mark where the tiny craft ought to appear again in the dark smother, she did not see on the deck below us a loose cargo of khaki shapes sprawling and slithering in bilge as she rolled, heaps of them, not caring whether or not a submarine got us. For here we were, in another age. I do not know why anyone finds difficulty with Einstein's theory of time and space, because in one's own trivial experience the impressions made by light and the clock are phantasmagoric in their transfusion. Memory can reduce the sorceries of *The Thousand and One Nights* to exactly what one would expect to happen.

A little later we saw something more, the familiar mass of the cathedral piled above the city of Amiens. We craned our heads to eye it while we could. Felix wondered whether anyone nowadays read Ruskin's tribute to that imposing shape, he doubted it though. So did we.

"Well, Ruskin deserves better of us."

We confessed that he did, it was time to turn to him again.

"Still," I apologized to Felix, "we had something else to think about, hadn't we? Ruskin never watched, one August midnight, the French abandon this city."

"Also," added Fabian, "he never had to shake the glass out of his whiskers after a bombing raid here. He always had plenty of leisure to study the doings of men whose work praised God. What time for that have we had?"

"I expect we've had as much as Ruskin," said Felix, for

Felix sees so well round a subject, and so much good in most people, that a stalwart angel may have to put him out of court for muttering, on the Day of Judgment, that after all poor Ananias knew not what he did. "I expect we've had as much time as Ruskin. He spent most of his life imploring men to turn from their ugly ideas and ungracious doings. If he had been here to shake the glass from his beard it would have made reverberations like thunder "

## WAGON-LIT

It may have been the fault of the merry and confidential little Frenchman, conductor of the coach for sleepers out of Paris for the southern frontier, because he waggled his finger jocularly when we boarded. He took the four of us aside, as though he had long expected us, and now he was happy. Whatever we might want, after sane people were asleep, he himself it was, he explained privily, who knew where to get it. Either that . . .

Anyhow, we were going to Malaga. It was an exhilarating thought. Long after our train, therefore, was dim and its corridors empty, when in fact the rush and sound of it in the night suggested our planet humming through the unlighted outer with its load of unconscious humanity to an end unknown, Felix sat on my berth, while we reviewed the ghosts of Fleet Street. I don't often see Felix now, and it was proper that just once in our lives, though late (and now the day was appointed), we should go to the very source and fount of sherry, and sit in a bodega of Jerez de la Frontera itself. We were on our way. There are many ghosts. As we accompany our planet on its long journey they begin to outnumber the living, and somehow become more interesting. Perhaps they were surprised to hear their names called aloud down wind in that area of the French night.

I do not know when Felix faded out. I noticed, or thought I did, when next I looked round, that there were no stars where our planet was then, or only one, and that was a tiny



moon, dun and blue, right overhead in the ceiling. Were we passing under Uranus? And the axis of the humming earth was badly adjusted. In its spinning and astronomical doings it shook and bumped the springs of my couch. I tried the other side, it was consoling to recall that with fair luck we should reach morning somewhere. Once we must have got into a long smooth patch of sky, for no lunging and jolting were noticed again till a faint strip of daylight appeared where there had been only my feet at the end of the berth, and that band deepened into a glimpse of a pallid land. The window blind had worked up a few inches. We had nearly reached the sun.

In less than one hour it was full July, no less. We were advancing slowly, as if our train were satisfied with its achievement, and wanted this, and the new smells and colours it had found, to be savoured. There is something, I thought, to be said for Mr Watt and his steam-engine. That land outside was a convinced south country, and it had been miraculously conjured up. In one night we had jumped two months, right over the solstice. The crops were well forward. The hay was cut. The herbs were tall, and some of them strange. Flax and broom blossoming together in a glowing dawn have to be seen to be believed.

#### A GLIMPSE OF WASTE LAND

At Irun railway station, over the frontier, I fancied a distinct lessening in the need for whatever had to be done. No problems were about. Our train was at rest. It looked as permanent as the platforms, but we agreed to wait till the platforms grew wheels. As foreign as anything were the shoe-shiners. In Spain these are artists, bending themselves to it as if the last stain of foreign mud must be abolished from all shoes entering Spain. During this ritual of purification—a polite hint that we were not all we should be, but were easily put right—we watched men in a variety of forgotten uniforms, standing near. Now we knew we

had done more than change the season of the year in a night; somehow, we were not too late for the Peninsular War. The illusion that we had lapsed more than a century into a lost summer might have been perfect, only the romantic fellows were in conversation with girls dressed as usual when going to picture-palaces in Birmingham, Brussels, or Chicago. Those girls would have been unnoticed at an Oxford Street sale. Robin in anticipation had been singing "Spanish Ladies"; now his song faded. There was nothing new to make a song about.

A porter, leaning against a station post, leaned in style. He leaned not self-consciously, but for himself alone. That was the way he always stood when at ease, with a post to help. There cannot be many idle rich in *Burke's Peerage* who do nothing with that grace. In Spain, if you are a porter, or only an intrusive foreigner, you are a *caballero*. A word askew which another man took to mean that he was no horseman, as a knight should be, and so was short in dignity and leisure, would be a breach of good manners, after you have passed at Irun out of the world of tractors and disciplined man-power. There you are a *caballero*, and must address a railway porter as one cavalier to another. We had become free; free to be even ourselves. Our aristocratic blood and state would be accepted with the mules and wayside weeds, on condition that we did not overlook the dignity of the soul in bootblacks and others; and how could one travel a greater distance than that, in one night? It is just as wonderful as finding oneself back in a forgotten time.

We had been warned that the train journey to Madrid would be tedious; that the Prado was hardly worth it. We saw the upper towers of Burgos, representing "one of the marvels of Gothic architecture in Spain," and those towers were so intricately marvellous that they satisfied at a half-mile. After Burgos it did begin to grow reconstructing.

Robin had jumped the claim to the here you are, still from the window, and sat there, lookin

one of our party who knew the land, he passed on information about it which was not easily separable from his solemn frivolity. His profile was benevolent yet regal, which you would expect in one of the last of the newspaper editors of the good days before circulations were expunded with insurance coupons and gifts of underclothing to ladies, for there is nothing between him and his readers but his mind, which is his own. As he sat there, light and sportive, as befits the just, he acquired in the gritty draught a resemblance to a patrician dustman whose basket is leaky, which gave his stories an adventitious interest. He was pleased to learn this. His funny stories, he admitted, needed touching up. The tedium of his juniors was relieved, anyhow. Anything for peace. The four of us would not be together this way again.

We began to traverse a prairie. The distance was empty, except of light. Lilac clouds were low on the horizon, they were mountains, but too remote to be in this life. There was a great heat between us and the ramparts of the world. This was where tedium ought to have threatened, for it intimidates or dismays us to have nothing to look into but empty space, the desert or the sea. We lose our bearings there, no steeples, no pig-farms, not a rendezvous! We begin to think of the day of our passing hence, and into that? Light in uninterrupted space does not support a sense of importance. The spectre of infinity is more than Christians care to watch, they have faith in eternity, but they want a cosy corner in it.

This Spanish region did not look like home, but like the old earth which has been patient since before the deluge, and can endure for ever, and without our help. We gazed over levels that were green or ochreous, that had a surround of arid hills worn to the bare bones, and scored by descending shadows that were dry channels. Sometimes cave-dwellings of purification—a bluff raised the expectation that a neolithic be, but were easilyng our train. The hills were of blanched of forgotten unifor—rever the weathering was fresh they

might have been dusted with snow; and were of amber or cinnamon sandstone, so delicate, with an undertone of gold, that they appeared to be tinted dilations without substance. There were no trees, except where the spires of poplars were ranked along an unseen river.

"This," Fabian speculated, "does not look like *Death in the Afternoon*." He had just closed that book and put it down.

Felix took a long look at the world outside. "Not much. But that may be no more than our impression after a good lunch. You see, if we call it life in the morning, cynical young critics might tell us we were showing the sentimental longings of senility." Felix, who lives up to his name, likes to be sure of the cause of happiness.

"Come on," cried Robin. "Break forth into joy! Sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem! Let's go on like that."

"Better not. Safety first, for me. You can't tell who is in the next compartment. All the sharper wits know that only old dodderers stick to Zion's hill, where every gate is desolate, because they're afraid to leave it. They don't know where else to go. And nobody shouts for joy—that isn't done. It's the sign of a weak head. We'd better keep mum, now we feel joyful. If you must have a hill, it's the fashion to go to the nearest suburban midden. There is sure to be a good service of electric trains. Take your bold stand on that, if it's still fresh. People see where you are then, and know what you mean."

"But I say, I've never been able to enjoy refuse dumps. Can't you let me off?"

"You'll get used to it. The trouble with you is that you are human and old-fashioned, so you can't see what younger people are forced to look at. Their outlook isn't so jolly different from discarded stuff on a vacant lot, a jumble of hopes and ideas chucked out in the rain. Even experienced journalists like you ought to have noticed by now that the new era cabbages are a devil of a while reconstructing through war's ashes and scrap iron. But there you are, still

kindly sowing the place with your liberal editorials. Why do you waste your linotypes? Your sort of journalism is about all that makes the knowing young things feel gay.

And I thought we were going to Seville, where the marmalade oranges come from!

But Seville is the very place where lusty youth looks for death in the afternoon isn't it? We're late.

Too late? No more cakes and ale?

I don't think so, not for a bit. People are off cakes. Cakes haven't enough kick. It takes a lot these days to make laughter hold both his sides—the threat of savage bulls just about raises a grim chuckle. Cakes and ale in moderation are all right for me. I don't want to be charged by bulls. Still we ought not to be surprised that younger folk want something spicier than confectionery. If we thought the world wasn't going to give us much more time for sensations I suppose we'd try to get some, and the more juicy the better. What would be the use of cake? What! you think it wouldn't do us any good? You bet it would. Wouldn't we be sure we were alive? The excitement is the good. That's the good this generation is after, as things are—I suppose it is always so, when war or plague are about. You oughtn't to blame them too much for it even in a leading article.

Then watch me. I won't. So we ought to hand it to them in Seville or anywhere else? Death in the afternoon is lovely?

Well, let's have some meat and drink first. Anyhow, we're sure to get in too late for death this afternoon. The worship of violence is in the rubrics of the latest religion as near as I can make it out for I guess even cruelty can be given a religion sanction. We've slipped back well towards Juggernaut. The drive of the time-spirit is towards the dark gods.

I'd like to see the cheerful idiot who started all this! Who brought that book along? Which one of us was it? I've got only newspapers.

"Our poet brought it, of course. Ask Fabian. He is human like you, only younger, so he doesn't like the look of it. I expect, instead of Zion, he dotes on Waste Land—tries to ease his mind with the ultimate truth, which for the modern intellectual is a perishing desert without so much as a match to start a nice fire. The Hollow Man enjoys his loneliness in the cold and empty universal. When the time of the singing of birds is come, that's the voice of the turtle we hear in our land."

"Then no wonder young low-brow Nazis rejoice to be reared for the prospect of a soldier before the ever glorious machine guns. How can we blame them?"

"Quite a happy release for them. They're better off, then. They've been told they are nothing, or no better than spare parts, so death can't be anything. Anyhow, at least they've got the Holy State. They've got something. They merge into the State—safe in the everlasting arms of Authority! The new Nirvana! You get the sense of glory that way when silly and hard up. The nation is the latest Oneness—the ineffable Mob!"

The poet gently protested. He avoided Waste Land. That is the refuge of the nihilist in despair. As to the state, a double-bottomed elephant, that! Brainless! It's name is Moloch. The State is all gun-metal, and its bowels are red-hot.

"That's all right. We'll let you off. You're what you are, with a soul you wouldn't trust even to the laundry. Your way is the way all stout elders brother take it—they hit back at the ugly blighter. But it makes as much difference as pulling a snook at a power-station."

But Fabian continued mildly to protest. He would not have it so. He asked us, with the diffidence of happy trust, whether Apollo was not the fellow to put out the fire in Moloch?

"I think he may. It's a long chance. Yes, he's the boy to do it. Now I think of it, that's why we are stealing this chance to look at El Greco's work. We hope that some

day he will do it. But please don't say anything about it. Most people wouldn't know what you meant, talking like that—they'd think you were still suffering from shell shock. Yet there are others, and they would sternly denounce you for sedition. You might get it in the neck.

And don't forget, someone reminded us, that these artists who take in desperation to the waste and nihilism, sometimes revolt against themselves also. They have no peace within, so they become haters—they must get rid of their spleen somehow. They dare not hit at the ruling powers, so they decry their own tradition. They turn as a last wild spree, from Ariel to Caliban.

I've been wondering myself, mused Robin, why the cleverer young artists and writers have been trying to worry me with wanton assaults. You think that's it? Then I won't give instructions to have them walloped any more. They weren't to blame, and I didn't know it. Though I don't enjoy it. I'll manage somehow without that nudden. I don't like blood and sand. Nor blunt descriptions of wenching. Nor sour parches about harlots where the tables and bottles go over. And the latest Aphrodite in marble, she's so damned unattractive too. She has elephantiasis. Without doubt she got that way after Eros was born. I don't care who his father was. Love would never have been born if Aphrodite had had such legs. I saw a modern picture of the Judgment of Paris, the other day. It was rough on Paris. I felt sorry for him. Hera, Athena and Aphrodite stood before him, and they looked like three stout muddled-aged parties joining a nudist colony. At one time, art was supposed to give a lead to life, now it thinks it ought to come down to the street level. I shall never see it that way. Too old! Look here, if this is going to last, and my feet would take kindly to the gravel of a barrack ground, I'd join the tank corps myself, and pray for a war. I'd try to make a noise like a young Nordic. Is it going to last? What's the idea behind it? Just because everybody has got as well-used to wreckage and murder on the wholesale

as to the morning postman, then the poet's pen is better used for *scratching*, instead of writing? Is that the only way to make us sit up and take notice?"

"Very likely. It's not my style. We can't even learn the technique of it. But when it is the certain way to attract attention there is a lot to be said for it. I think it is bound to last, for a spell; bound to last, while pessimism and materialism last."

"Cheerio. Ah, well, we had a good innings. What's more, if we get a bomb in Madrid, instead of wine, you have rationalised it. It would be nothing to bother about. All according to Cocker! Somehow, I see it fitting in nicely with what a German professor is telling the world. Here it is—I was reading it this morning. He says we must have a new mystical faith in the blood. I don't understand it myself. I was wondering what the deuce it was all about. I was going to ask you. He talks of a faith that believes the divine nature of man is preserved in a special flow of dedicated blood. It certainly is queer. Is that a proletarian substitute for the old rite of the Eucharist?"

"Round about that, at a guess. It only wants a stronger faith to believe it. It wants more faith than doubters used to be able to find for the Trinity, lots more. But we mustn't let them see that we are amused. It is too soon yet to expect to rouse a general laugh. That idea of blood communion is not only German; it is fairly general. It must be at the bottom of all nationalism. When men and women get into an awful mess they become ferociously serious and mystical, and they want to herd together. When they're massed and are *singing solemnly in unison*, we'd better be careful. They're dangerous, then. The immediate impulse of common sense is to reason it out of them, but that's no good. You only get a black eye if you try, and you're lucky if you don't get more. It is silly to argue with hallucination, which can be as logical as Aristotle. The only thing to do is to let the patients shout and fling about till they've exhausted themselves. I suppose what all the world ought to have



is bromide, and a week in bed. We've got plenty of the same trouble in England. Our own most discussed novelist and philosopher of this century was convinced of something, which I could never fathom, in this notion of the blood-consciousness. I used to think he was only muddled and wild, and gave little attention to his books, but I see now he was a prophet. So there is nothing new and alien in the idea. He distrusted the head. The funny thing is, many intelligent people do now. Brains cause our troubles. Haven't we plenty of trouble? Very well, then. The mind is in disgrace, these days. The mind is no good. Trust your intuitions, trust your instincts. They are true because fundamental. We are beginning to be persuaded that it was a mistake to have the eyes in the head. They ought to be below the waist line. There they could look out direct from the seat of our thrills, while a new philosophy, much more comforting to green wits, was generating lower down.

The editor with liberal ideas did not answer that. Instead, absently he picked up a bottle from the seat beside him and reversed it over the floor. A few drops fell from it reluctantly. 'Look at that,' he begged us. 'Now look at that! Turn down an empty glass! Yet you told me this was a wayzgoose. Is there nothing left of this Spanish holiday but the scenery?'

We then noticed it was still there, but it was changing. The prospect of Spain was as though it had endured from the first creative word, yet was not old, and would be the same after the next election, and after the latest religion, too, had sunk into the sleep of Aman-Ra. A girl, resting one hand on the flank of a cow, watched us with upturned face from a field. She remained as still while our modern engine thundered past as the weathered rock by which her animal was grazing. Her eyes were as tranquil as the past, though as animating as a surprise by good fortune. They who can wait because time is theirs stand with the non-chalance of that girl. The cow was white and had a black nose.

Late that afternoon we threaded the high land which all the morning had been far clouds of lilac. These were real mountains; snow was about their tops. A riot of granite blocks hung over us on the upper slopes, as if it had just paused in its descent but might begin careering again at any moment. Clumps of gnarled evergreen oak held the grey hummocks while we crawled past and up. There were ravines where goats stood at the rim of space nibbling perilous tufts. It was not a land in which to be lost at night, but it promised sanctuary, at need, from the distractions caused by our fellow-men while thrashing out the best for each other.

#### THE SPANISH LEGEND

Madrid, first glimpsed from a hotel bus in the evening, is a city which may be entered straight from a railway coach at any terminus amid a white population. It is like that. Our hotel there, too, was merely in a capital city. It pretended to have no language of its own. My nervous attempt at a Spanish phrase was answered promptly as if I were at a bureau in Piccadilly, and with the same accent. Evidently this caravanserai (which is a panoramic word, a casement with minarets in the distance, suitable to the land next to Africa) considered all guests to be detachments from uniform humanity, who would be distressed by the slightest variation in a hotel which reminded them that they were not in Philadelphia or Paris.

We soared swiftly and casually in a lift to a great altitude, accompanied by a proud magnifico, and had the feeling of dead souls who very humbly had expected the worst but had passed muster, and were granted remote and minor places within the Great Radiance. We came to our quarters, and were shown that the most distant bedroom had its own bathroom. I counted enough faucets in mine to occupy the expert attention of a sanitary engineer before he dared to summon the floods. I remembered that we had been warned to be aware of intimate insects in Spain; but an active ento-

mologist would have had no more to do in a new royal palace than in all the hotels we saw there

A doubt came into my hygienic and pictureless bedroom in old Madrid. Now, what about that Castle in Spain? Was that also in a land that may be entered only through the looking-glass? The vision was fading, here was the waking moment. That castle had gone. Some day soon we should all have to be engineers in a world that has become as utilitarian as a vast *labor*. Very likely the last wonder faded in Spain into the light of common day when King Alfonso was handed a single ticket and was warned that he would be unlucky to miss the next train.

Once a boy who was with us on an English beach, poking into crannies the day after a westerly gale, found a coin. We named it, of course, a doubloon. There was no excitement, the occasion was too serious for that. We stared at the find, without talk. This was what we had heard about, always heartened by the tales yet still agnostic. That sort of luck has happened, but it does not happen to-day. Does one keep watch across the sparkling bay on a fine morning, expecting Drake to round the familiar headland? Quoth the Raven, Nevermore! There the coin was, though, in the boy's palm, and a golden guinea would not have had the same virtue. A guinea would have been only money, it could not have put the beach in another light. The legend of a galleon hangs about that shore.

Though comparatively few English people visit Spain, that land has a peculiar fascination for most of us, and an analysis of it might have a conclusion in no more than happy lunacy. There would be something of the Hesperides in it, something of Arabia, and something of Elizabethan sea stories. A knowledge of Rome and Athens does nothing to qualify it. This I mentioned in sudden surprise to Robin, while unpacking. 'It's a ghimmer of the fires of the Inquisition,' he suggested. They light fitfully the recesses of our Protestant minds.

That also perhaps has something to do with it, but it

does not explain everything. Balboa, mistaken for stout Cortes when gazing at the Pacific, did not a little, in prompting Keats, to make our surmise wild. Other European countries had soldiers and explorers, but no conquistadores. I know what it is to pry within the vines and foliage of a tropical island, now rarely visited, and uncover the stones of an ancient fort, and find an incised Spanish word or two. How deep then is the silence and solitude! One looks seaward, and waits for nothing.

Though there is no need to go as far as the Moluccas, and do that, to see the splendid mirage of proud man's endeavour. He has been magnificent, foolish, insatiable, and cruel, his ambition defying whatever his fellows had learned to be right, in pursuit of his dream of power which led to the dust. One of his Castilian guns is a bollard by a ruined jetty of that conquered island of the tropics; but to-day no ships come. The *hidalgo* sailed round the world to bring that to pass. Still, we are so happy to-day when playing with the romantic word *galleon* that we use it on inappropriate occasions. When roused and ardent, we see our own ships with their guns as haughty and domineering galleons. Only the forts decay; the dream is imperishable.

Nothing in English history, not even the years of Napoleon's threat, has left so many phantoms and legends round our shores as the Armada of Philip II. The tales are so much of the native lore on some coasts, in the West Country, the northern isles of Scotland, and in Irish bays, the kind of thing everybody is supposed to know, that you get the idea that if your eyes were good enough then a forlorn derelict of the tragedy would be still in the offing. Occasionally something of the sort is about. There is a whisper of Spanish blood to explain a rich dash of colour locally, and what in a plain Saxon would be wanton. This survival is not always forlorn nor tragic. It is otherwise. One summer's day, lost with a friend at the back of the cliffs of Bideford Bay, which was a lonely land in the years before the motor-coach, we ventured within the enclosure of a farm, for nobody was

about, to ask our way, and upset the dogs. Those bounding brutes made the first show of active life we had met for hours. They broke the silence horribly. At once two tall girls appeared, their lips parted in surprise, and stared at us. No wonder the dogs fell quiet! Our answering regard came also of surprise. If a Spanish invasion had not been successful in that neighbourhood, how did those girls get there? We doubted whether we should address them in English, but English, even of Devon, they were Norman blood? That would be only diluted and diffused stuff. It could never give that rich tincture.

Spanish words and legends dispose our minds to faith. It is easier to believe in buried treasure once we know it was abandoned by Spanish seamen, though its place is as conjectural as where we lost that blessed wallet. This shows, as does the innocent assurance of poetry, the magic of words, so why argue? When our faith is strong we become intolerant of argument. They are compelling words, those in the records of voyages during the great years when the faith of Spaniards was so strong that it was never strange to them that other men had no rights. Mexico, Peru, La Florida, Cartagena, the Caribbees, Cabo de Gracías a Dios, Trinidad, Panama—but that will do, we know about it. We do not know what in reality is there, but that does not matter. Personal indulgence of that kind is no worse than collecting incunabula. We must dream, we must dream, though it is as well to dream, like John Ball, of a world in which men have cast their rigs and weapons. Is there a reality of our own days which dismays us that is not a projection of the nightmare of a bad dreamer? Then let us have good dreams. Let us dream, like Columbus, of an Earthly Paradise, though hoping for a better awakening.

I was thinking of Columbus, while unpacking. We had noticed a likable tiny model of the *Santa María* in the hotel lounge, among shawls, metalware from Granada, and old Moorish plates, for sale to tourists. Robin had pointed it out. It would not be easy to name another explorer—

better, perhaps, to call Columbus a discoverer, for he cannot be classed with the great seamen and navigators—it would not be easy to find another character in the whole Hakluyt Series whose personality, attainments, and motives, make a problem as strange as is that of the man Columbus.

He knew the magic in words; but did he know anything else? He was moved by faith alone. Contemporaries who thought he was mad were wrong, unless a confidence which is sure of its direction by the Holy Trinity is madness. But the bewilderment and distrust of his contemporaries is understandable. We need not wonder that Ferdinand and Isabella were doubtful of the first great project, and were so dilatory in providing Columbus with the means to it. For one thing, their work of driving the Moors out of Granada, and the money for that, necessarily worried them. Columbus, too, was most explicit about the rewards he expected for his success, that success which was, he knew, inevitable. Yet what was to be its form? Apparently he was not so explicit about that. He had Divine support, which should be enough for anybody. His prospectus was fascinating, and as gloriously vague as that of a later South Sea Company.

If you keep sailing westward, at length you come to the east. So much was known, to a number of people, even in the days of the Reyes Catolicos. Yet did Columbus set forth to reach Cathay, or thereabouts, by the west? Or was something else in his mind? Even the royal promoters of his first enterprise were well aware that Cipango, and the Grand Khan, were important facts. The grandeur and power that Marco Polo had indicated were realities; Columbus could not have expected to be Viceroy out there. Then where? Nobody knows.

In those days, anyhow, there was a land, and it was more than a fable, called *Terra Australis*. It shows in a sixteenth-century map drawn by a cartographer from France (who probably knew a few secrets of Portuguese discoveries) for Henry VIII. Columbus must have known of that yarn, and he would have believed it, for it accorded with his faith.

More than that, he knew the earth to be not a perfect sphere, because he had to account for an Earthly Paradise, which did not show in any atlas then known only because nobody had seen it. Says he "I have been led to hold this concerning the world, and I find it is not round but that it is the shape of a pear which is everywhere very round except where the stalk is, for there it is very prominent, or that it is like a very round ball, and on one part of it is placed something like a woman's nipple, and that this part where the protuberance is found, is the highest and nearest the sky, and it is beneath the equinoctial line and in this Ocean sea at the end of the east. It was there he would find this Paradise, and his belief was supported by the opinion of wise and holy theologians.

That was why he knew, when he reached San Salvador, that the war-like excursions of the natives he witnessed meant trouble for the Grand Khan. How could it be otherwise when he recognised Cuba as Japan? He had reached the east, and thus had only to come to the end of it to find the protuberance nearest the sky, and as he had always known the earth was smaller than was supposed then Paradise could not be far off. It is noteworthy that his course, though westward, had a southerly trend. He just missed the discovery of Florida, and by inference Mexico, through not holding due west. He turned south, drawn by the opinion of holy theologians? The greatest of all geographical discoveries appears to have been born of chance, and was unnoticed by its discoverer, just as the revealing of more and more of North America came through still further prying after another route to China.

In Seville Cathedral is the worthy tomb of the great Explorer. His bones rest in a heroic bronze casket upborne

I was thinking representative of Spain's old kingdoms, noticed a likable Leon, and Navarre. When Columbus lounge, among slit in Valladolid, but not for long. He was Moorish plates, sod was forgotten, for thirty years. It was it out. It would not he had wished to rest in San Domingo

Thereupon he again crossed the Atlantic. When that island went to the French, the remains of Columbus were removed to Havana. Not so long ago Cuba was taken in charge by the United States, and patriots returned his bones to Spain, even to Seville.

Yet now the French declare that the remains of Columbus never left San Domingo; traces exist, they say, to prove it. What was removed from there, we are told, were the bones of a relative. Then is it the vestige of another Columbus that is honoured in Seville Cathedral?

Well, Columbus was ever unfortunate. He did not even guess his astonishing good luck as a discoverer—if a discovery so terrifically potent and ominous may be called good luck—but he did know, and he never ceased to be sorrowfully aware of it, that fate had an ugly way of thwarting him. His melancholy shade would observe those bones in that celebrant cathedral casket at Seville in perfect understanding. So it had always happened.

I told Robin something of this, while we prepared to go out to see the town. "What does it matter?" he exclaimed, as I shut the door; "America exists! Mark Twain has a good piece about Columbus somewhere, and that is more than we shall ever get."

#### Café of the Revolutionists

We found ourselves in the Plaza de las Cortes. That this was Madrid was fairly certain, but we saw at once that if there is an old Madrid it exists only as a fable to furnish songs for guitars and gramophones. The city looked what it is, the outcome of a political need for a central place where the government could reach out more easily all round. It was the names of the streets which told us where we were in Europe, more likely than not, this hot still night. We escaped out of a swift flood of traffic to the shore of an island in the midst of it, and paused there before risking the loud and flashing cataract of cars and taxis beyond.



It was a tiny refuge, and deserted. Nobody else was on it, except a statue. With the dazzle and uproar of a great city around it was forlorn and dim. Who shared with us this quiet islet, which was as apart and unregarded as if sunk in the past? Cervantes!

We were in the right land. There was a narrow turning—we stopped at each corner to relish the names—the Calle Zorrilla and beyond that was a broad and thronged highway, the Calle de Alcalá. The engines in the road were whooping and abrupt, but the promenaders were noticeably quiet and leisured folk, easy of manner. There were club-buildings as important in size as London banks, and their members sat on terraces outside sombrely unaware not only of passers by, but of each other. Robin wondered what would happen if a tired stranger were to sit in a vacant chair with the elect, but probably he was the only anarchist in Spain who had ever thought of so violent an act. The elect of one club were separated by a glass screen on the sidewalk from citizens enjoying the warm night at the little the protûs of the Cafe Granja del Henar, a famous place, known the efre revolution was argued out and shaped to dise could ne of King Alfonso

though westwasy to find a table, and we had to insinuate the discovery tgh the inches between the groups. Yet my not holding du at first, that we were politely unobserved, opinion of holy men trying to sell lottery tickets, a trade phical discoverien that of the samphure gatherer—who did was unnoticed by f it—for the peddling of tickets by these more and more of f a worse lottery than the promise of a prying after anothernd, though it was after midnight, the

In Seville Cathedrrs were courteous and hopeful, as Exeamer. His bones at late hour had armfuls of neckties

I was thinking reprt last. Do hopeless men, in Madrid, noticed a likable t Leon neckties, if their desperate decision lounge, among sht in v

Moorish plates, fod wa ese wandering vendors of boot-it out. It would not he y tickets had noticed that strangers

were there, until presently there arose a trifling difficulty with a waiter. Did he expect us to drink more? Or to pay for more than we could drink? Our Spanish was ineffective. A man sitting near lifted his tired dark eyes to us, and then to the waiter, with the expression of a worn aristocrat who had nothing more to learn of life, and with the grace of a lily-white hand and two soft words he abolished the matter; it was the easy decision of an artist.

He conversed with us in a mixture of English, French, and Spanish, and his air was that of one who had vivacity, but is now fatigued by what he had seen around him during another long ridiculous day. This had made him sallow and apathetic, for though he never expected his fellows to be rational beings, yet so much energetic and serious folly had ceased to be amusing.

He supposed England and America to be on more solid bases than Spain. No? It was not always easy to distinguish his irony from graciousness with visitors. In gay melancholy, he declared, in answer to Robin, that he knew nothing about his country that a man who would buy a dog would accept as proof.

Then, was there anybody who knew? Ah, yes, he smiled: "many are talking." To me his dark and lively eyes, his saturnine nose, his sensuous lips, those slight and careless movements of his hands, and the abandon in his civil mockery of the things most of us cherish, were a fair substitute for a romantic Madrid which I do not suppose ever existed.

It was one o'clock in the morning. The theatres were now emptying. The pavement was crowded. It was like London's West End at eleven at night. In Madrid, he told us, nobody has ever stayed long enough at a café to see it close, so we had plenty of time.

A man with the face of this Latin could be no more of a Christian, even in Catholic Spain, than one of the legendary frequenters of the hills haunted by improper hoofs and laughter. Sometimes, when he peered slyly at us, his smile was as a glance seen for an instant in an ambush where

nothing was suspected. His gesturing was as good as his words: it was supplementary speech. It must take a people several thousand years to learn that eloquence with hands alone. And I could guess that politicians, however clever in their conjuring with popular emotions, would have a miserable time of it were they doomed to address, for their preferment, so charming a sceptical intelligence as this Spaniard's, should it ever prevail. For but the movement of an eyebrow, or the lift of a finger, would tell them they were wasting their talents. The politician must have an easier task in England or Germany than in Spain, in spite of the long rule of the Church there, or perhaps because of it. In Spain, there is a common attitude of disbelief, at once uncharitable and jolly, towards the sentiments of eloquent patriots.

We had come almost within view of sunrise. The sky had turned nearly as pale as my tired mind. Everybody went on quietly talking, though, with no sign yet of having had enough of it. Now, Robin can sleep anywhere, at any moment, if the hour is before dinner, but after dinner he expects you to be like himself, alert, merry, and full of devices and excellent badinage. And Felix, too, can hold the other wicket with Robin till the clock in the pavilion has run down, and continue to make runs. They have genius. Somehow, Fabian and I felt we must either hunt in utter exhaustion for the hotel, or else buy neckties and have done with it. It was morning, but Madrid in that main street was waking up, multitudinous, though it had not yet gone to bed.

#### MORNING IN MADRID

When the sun is not wanted in Spanish rooms it can be shut out. I thought the hour was small because the room was cool and dark, but then saw scattered slats of the jalousies fierce points and incanorous plates. The morning must be well enlarged. I thought it would be, an important movement of the first

day in a foreign city. The eyes refused to look at the outside on the instant. The stones and walls were radiant. The lane below had more sunlight than it could hold. A team of mules trampling slowly through were not sleek but brightly polished, and their resigned ears worked loose as they hauled two *hogsheads* of wine, on which maroon stains marked the staves of new oak. A man whose head and breast showed he got as much sunlight as the vines, sang an outlandish song to his team.

It was agreed at breakfast that the Museo del Prado could wait. It was too soon for museums; this was only the first day. A hot day it fully was, so soon after the night. A devotion to art vanished, in that light. We wandered aimlessly instead through narrow streets, looking, I suppose, for what had ceased to be there. Whenever we make a journey through a place new to us, it is curious that we rarely find what we go to see, unless we refuse to believe we are mistaken. "Ah," said some people in London, to whom Spain is nothing new; "What is the good of going there? It has lost everything which made it Spain, since it became a republic; ruined!"

That may have been the reason why we experienced chiefly the heat, in Madrid. The shops displayed what may be seen anywhere, the consequence of production by the ship-load. Only the greengrocers in the alleys were original. If a fashionable window offered Spanish fans, they were probably from Tokyo. The Spanish shawls were unloaded from Shanghai. All this was wearisome, but at least it promised that any tobaccoist would be an agent for the Anglo-American universal providers, but there we were wrong, unluckily; Madrid tobaccoists had nothing between picture-postcards of famous toreros and cinema stars, and brown-paper packets of what could have been powdered tea-leaves.

Well, it is the way of a new land to begin by dashing our hopes, and to do it without a sense of fun. It is left to the traveller to learn, if he can, that reality is stranger than

fiction, rarely so enjoyable, and never so easily understood. Nor does it greatly help to be simply honest about it, and to own up to that fact, for the longer our journey the greater grows the confusion in the spectacle of things as they are.

What are they? He is an experienced traveller who can say, with a laugh, that the more he sees of the world the less he knows of it. Presently he is never sure whether the reality is now before him, or whether he is being victimised once more by the countenance he imposes on it. He has to watch himself closely, as well as the scene. That may explain why it is easier to write fiction than to relate particulars of the common day that are undeniable, yet seem apparitions by moonlight, disturbing to our complacency, and making us wonder whether we are now aware, as by a casual hint, of the equivocal nature of the earth and of men.

The witnesses who enjoyed Don Quixote's remarkable capers knew the reality so well that they laughed at him. They knew what was there, and he did not. They could be sure they were right, too, for they were all in agreement about the facts. Yet we remember that eloquent politicians frequently ask—intending to answer for us before we have thought it out—what are the facts? Those men do not find it hard to tell us, for they have only to please themselves by pleasing us with a confirmation of our suspicions. Yet the facts, especially in a country which we know chiefly through tales that are told, are commonly no more than views dissolving of prospects which never had actuality. A glimpse of the veritable landscape may come through presently, when it is unsought.

Thus experience in travel does not fortify us with the confidence we get from a sound political doctrine. Chance glimpses do not last long enough to disclose all that is there. They allow no repose on easy and comfortable prejudices which are as supporting as the blue-prints of Creation whenever we are lost, for a spell, amid the world's shifts and turns. Thus it happens that an unexpected surmise may disturb a traveller who would get at the truth, whispering

of another dimension, not yet well known, and so he may be shocked with a view of an actuality he has been so sure about that once he agreed with his neighbours, and called it London.

We should be more at ease without these surmises. It would raise difficulties, were men to see as gods, right through objects. It would be too bad to learn, in one penetrating survey prompted by a chance surmise, that we have been industrious where little good is to be got, and that we must begin anew, if the fields of earth are to look better than they are.

But have not difficulties already come, through that very vision? The institutions of the Commonwealth are even now wavering, as if built of ideas that were beginning to evaporate. They are drifting away everywhere as vapours. That usual day and scene in which we felt we could always do a bit better with more industry and experience has shaken, like a veil in an unfelt wind, like a view no more enduring than a theatrical back-cloth.

Did it really move? Is it possible that our familiar scene is not permanent, that it does not arise profitably out of eternal controls which we have found to be gratifying, but may so alter that we should fail to recognise it, even at an Economic Conference? It seems so. We are waiting for our doubt to be settled by expert seers, or by dictators gifted in the use of Aaron's magic, men who can start a dry rock into flowing with perennial refreshment. For we had better admit it. In recent years the immemorial view has shaken as though it were transient in the breath of the unseen. The established work of our hands, despite its scientific foundation, has become as worrying as that trick with a magic-lantern when several shadows appear on the screen together, moving and indecisive, and without a name.

The worst of it is, when we need the light-hearted way of immortals in giving things another shape, at will, we do not feel as gods. What, begin anew? Build afresh? Do

it all over again in a new and better way? The only evidently god-like feature in the commonalty is that lofty inconsequence shown by our various understudies of Moses, though it is possible that their superior demeanour, which we hopefully admire, may be no more than a disguise for their intent. It may mask also a moral code too strange for common use, and therefore better out of our knowledge, such as that once pertaining to the Great Ones on Olympus. It is right that the high gods should not allow us to know what they whisper in their secret councils. What is Olympus based on but our humble acceptance of its sublimity? Why, without the Great Ones in the heights, it is clear we should have to look after ourselves, and that would mean personal thought and enterprise.

It is also clear that somewhere or other I have lost the other three fellows in Madrid, a city which deceives a newcomer with its familiar appearance, yet somehow has all its streets deceptively reshuffled. When I last saw them they were inspecting Spanish fans from Japan, trying to believe they were beautiful.

#### EL COCODRILO

In my search for the lost men I happened into a little square shaded by plane trees, and there they were, irresolute about the door of a *taberna*. Before returning to the hotel, feeling, without confessing it, that this first day was done for, and nothing found in it, it was better to rest and fix the hour for flight. The inconspicuous *taberna* was called *El Cocodrilo*.

I noticed, glancing round the saloon, odd mural decorations. Their line was simple but extravagant, their colours animating, and their subject preposterous. It is doubtful if even Mr Grock, whose adventures seemed to be the story these walls serialised, could have won that coy and languishing expression into the face of a lady crocodile, but there it was. I drew the attention of Robin to this, he is a critic of art,

and therefore sees in pictures what is invisible to others. He looked, was at once alert, and rose. These walls told the story of the blandishment of the wild by a fiddler who resembled Grock in his kindly but idiotic whimsicality. So, to be acceptable to an age of irresolution which mocks itself with jazz, Orpheus is bound to appear, I suppose.

Robin let us see that we were unimportant and forgotten. The walls absorbed him. "This," he advised us at last, "would make a London pub famous. That fellow at the café last night was telling us of a caricaturist, pretty influential here. Bagaria is his name. This work is his. He must be the greatest fellow at the game in Europe."

That night the rest of the party regretted that we had ever entered *El Cocodrilo*. We were distressed by Robin's recollection of a newspaper office in Madrid which has more of Bagaria's work. Our elder and leader is the most active man of our party; and now, in addition to his devotion to art, the journalist in him was roused. We must be off. That newspaper office must be found.

There was a common protest. Don't be a fool! Pictures at midnight? "Art," he told us, "is for all the hours. We ought to show these Latins that we know a thing or two. We'll surprise them with our Nordic love for the true and beautiful. Let them see we know more about Madrid than they know of London. Form the line of march!"

That caricaturist may be locally famous, but I am sure the editorial staff of *El Sol* thought we were crazy. A conductor was found to take us to the refectory, where the murals were to be seen; and that guide at least was puzzled, and I thought a little scared, by Robin's evident determination either to view the paintings at that hour or publish the truth about Spain.

There the stuff was. Not seldom Robin's perverse resolve to go somewhere, and drag us after him, has its compensation. These decorations for the mess-room of a newspaper office were the most sensational feature of Madrid I experienced there, except the savage grace of Goya. The carica-



turist has chosen to picture about sixty of the world's famous men, ancient and modern, each holding a refreshing cup. His selection from our English notabilities is curious. I found only Shakespeare, Dickens, Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and Oscar Wilde, and Wilde is the most conspicuous of the English great, as one usually and wonderingly finds him on the Continent. About all this representation of the men the world reveres plays a merry hooting so cruel in its uncanny divination into frailty that it would keep Jupiter indoors, if he thought Bagaria was looking up at the clouds, though I do not think that Spaniard wastes much time gazing heavenward.

Shakespeare and Dickens have slightly intimidated the artist, and his effort to show respect for them must have given him a dreadful internal throe, and he appears to have gone through the same agony of composure for the sake of El Greco. The figures of nearly all the rest, Socrates and Dante and the paramount few in history, would reconcile the most ambitious of us to the usual kindly obscurity within the level multitude. The faces of Herbert Spencer and Darwin, for instance, warn us of the consequence of brain pondering its own gravity, sunny imbecility would be better than that. A bow of blue ribbon adorns the tail of a white poodle dog which has frivolously intruded into the congress of the elect, an adventitious object there, and it has the face of Voltaire.

It was not easy to leave that room, though our conductor showed signs that he knew those drawings very well, rather too well perhaps. I returned again to this feature and that, as one does, doubting, but fascinated, to a cruel satire by Goya. Each allusive dab of colour begins to grimace at a human failing if you fix it too long in questioning embarrassment.

Those recognisable grotesques range the room in a diabolic riot, and deride the central settled estimate of values. They knock about gaily our acceptances. Latin scepticism is near to what a northerner would call malevolence, only it is redeemed by a grace and wit beyond his

power. This scepticism allows few estimates to be settled, and permits few gods to pass without a hint of a disreputable rumour.

Maybe there is a signal merit in it, for these uncertain days. It is possible that the security of the Spanish administration depends chiefly on a lively variety of cynical counterpoising opinions, which will continue to shift and flicker in quick intelligences that are aware of the folly of demanding progressive good, especially of its great men.

Here, perhaps, with that admission, we had better be cautious. Mirth at wit's irreverence is a sign of growth. It is good to laugh at ourselves. There is not much nonsense in anybody who can see the fun of it when an attitude before an altar betrays undue solicitude for Omnipotence as a tender invalid. Our pause at the chuckle of diabolism may make us wiser, if a little sad, with its chill of a suspicion over conduct we had thought was all right. Yet need culture be but a balance of sceptical opinions, showing indolently in a playful smile which is sufficiently mischievous to tarnish the brightness of unreserved virtue?

"Ah," says the Devil gently, "but should virtue be unreserved? You know, I warned Christ that he would waste himself on the cross. Pilate offered him a chance, but he wouldn't take it. He had only himself to thank for what happened. And look at the trouble he caused!"

"Have you noticed," I asked the Devil, "that though Bagaria has mockery for nearly everybody—he just manages to show a trace of respect for two or three men—yet he leaves Christ out of it?"

"What of that? I'm not to be found on the walls, either."

"You know perfectly well there is hardly anything on the walls but you."

#### BUS TO TOLEDO

This Spanish autobus, I thought, reluctant to board it, must be a relic of Carlist days. Its mudguards told us that in its young pride it had attempted a precipice, but

with no luck. Some of its sunblinds were down, and they would not go up. They were tattered banners. Others were up, but stuck. If a window was closed, then it was fixed. It could not be persuaded, until the bus was bumping over a rough patch, and you were holding on, then it dropped on your fingers. The driver was a good man. He could drive. But Old Horny himself, I suppose, would be the fellow to steer backwards downhill with neither brakes nor power while making derisive wheels just clear the edge of a precipice all the way. Now what! Everything was missed, though. But these autobuses to me are leviathans preternaturally headlong, and I shall never like them.

This one was said to be going to Toledo. I did not believe it, but got in. Do buses go to Xanadu? Is there such a place? Artists and poets are reported to know the road, and just go, when they are lifted up, but engines never get there. However, we all entered this one, with knapsacks, though no faith in an eventual Toledo. The morning was blazing, and at least this caravan was shade.

The dilapidated enormity moved off with the ease of a lithe snake. Our driver poured it round the sharp bends of city streets as though the thing were an articulated reptile. If you trust in magic, then put your money on Horny, go all out. He knows.

In a run of about ten minutes Madrid declined from the pomp of a capital city to the usual random outskirts, where a populace can set but a few spare onions as defence between itself and the bottomless. We passed huge new rookeries, cliff dwellings of plaster, about which young life swarmed over dusty ground with goats and old tins. Bedding was bulged out of upper eyries to get a touch of sweetness and light against the sweaty dark, and washing was looped <sup>those</sup> in mid-air as if the suburbs had something to diabolic not ~~were too hard-up~~ to do it with coloured bunting values. They <sup>t</sup>, what a blind drive there must be in the scepticism is <sup>t</sup>, for it to flood the countless cells of those violence, only it with babies!

That fountain was doing better than the River Manzanares, which we then crossed, for it was very weak in its bed; it was not far from complete absorption into the hot gully of bluff porous rock through which it was creeping. Beyond the river we began to traverse a sun-baked plain.

The plain was almost without features. Evidently the road was trying to go directly over it, straight away, because nothing was there to keep it loitering. But the release of the eye to the distance, over seas of grain, and the few men and beasts at work, who had been doing things there since before Deuteronomy was written, and as near as I could judge from an autobus were doing them in the way prescribed in the Old Testament, and with the same implements, was a better assurance of continuity than the dewy optimism of young life in the city's tenements. A modern industrial city does not now always convince me that it has conquered nature, established itself substantially on brickwork which will last longer than the hills, and so can look eternity in the eye. At one time it did; a lad who got his early impression from what was going on about the Mansion House, the Bank of England, Lloyd's, and Leadenhall Street, would naturally suppose that his feet were on the Rock of Ages when it was only asphalt. Later on, came Ypres. Perhaps the aspect of Nineveh, which I saw Ypres attain in a month or two, and which some important British towns, once strong in their pride of coal and iron, seem on the way to attain, should things continue as they are, has shaken my faith in human prowess, when it builds to the plans of inordinate desires. This high plateau outside Madrid was still under sun and corn; it looked well and brown. Strangely, it keeps its health with the means which may be seen figured on the monuments of old Egypt.

The level corn, the autobus, and the raw earth, flowed on for hours. Sometimes we passed men and women riding mules, but they showed no more than their indifferent beasts that they saw us. A windmill personable on the sky-line was a relief, or a white bell-tower with some crumbling

mud hovels about it, or the low circular parapet of a well near the road, with a bough over it as a hoisting jib, where the moisture sent up a few trees to put shadows on the prairie. As far as we could see, and we could see for miles, there was no Toledo, and no promise of it. It was only a name.

Nor can I recall how we got there, but in a moment we were approaching the Middle Ages. I suspected there had been something run about our driver, but while looking at this season's crops had not noticed that he was driving backwards through time.

#### VESTIGE

That is how we arrived, and that may be the right way to find Toledo. The place exists, you can believe that, while you see it. To the south of the city is high land, and from those heights, though Toledo's towers are immediate on the opposite hill, it does not appear to have any break in its ramparts, and they surmount a ravine which sunders it. The city is in sight, but is as removed as a shape in the sky usually is. You even suspect that you have chanced on a lucky day when the sun's angle and a certain state of the air make clear this local memory of what once was there. The city mounts in terraces, unsubstantial facets and thin shadows, from the ravine to its central towers. The wilderness is around.

Well, Toledo is good enough where it is. If men would let the richness of their experience speak, make plain the dignity of their commune, that is the way to set their city, on such a hill. So a traveller expects no more than that hint from the past, and rests while viewing it.

The steep upland about him is shadeless. It gets all the sun. Only heath grows there, sage, and other sparse and astringent stuff which can make shift on friable granite. The heat radiating from the ground smells of herbs. There is no sound but the whispering of crickets, and nothing

moves, except a butterfly that planes lazily down and drops over the verge into the gulf. There is nothing to show that the sculptured hilltop across the valley is not as empty now as the steep from which you see it. That discrete city is buoyant, as if its lucid stones had become independent of the sun. It was there so long that it took on the nature of morning and evening. The Tagus winds below, in the gorge; you can see remote lengths of it, brighter than the sky, under spectral grey walls.

## TOLEDO

We crossed the gorge by a long thread of spidery masonry held at each end by a massive gate-tower. Once on a time only birds could have got in and out of Toledo, when a righteous conviction with spears and swords was alert. It was a surprise to find that we could cross over and go through. It was a greater surprise to find that the sundered mountain, piled over with antiquities, was populous.

Just within its walls is a chapel and cloisters. The front of the chapel is festooned with manacles and leg-irons, the votive offerings of Christians after the Moors were driven from Granada. Those chains hanging from a florid Gothic pile are enough to warn you that the dust of Toledo is too mixed and questionable to be disturbed; you cannot tell what gibbering warnings, what doubts of human destiny, would rise if it were stirred. Anyhow, the inhabitants seem to know they are continuing the drama of their city beyond the end by remaining there, so they try to be ghosts, and glide about in felt slippers.

Toledo's numerous asses, however, a tall and robust tribe, clatter over the historic cobbles indifferently, even explosively. It isn't their story, and they don't care. While you sniff incense, and you must, for it drifts in to the causeways from so many ancient and sacred doors, the hoofs detonate on the ladder-like paving. In such a burgh, where at times you expect an alley to end on space, you wonder

whether a silly hoof may not kick away a lump of floor and expose the sky underneath I do not remember another sound there, except that, when standing alone with the past, pensive before the crumbling reminder of an aspiration which went awry long ago, an ass let go his reverberant soul just behind me. Perhaps the asses, a race of the purest blood, with convictions which never change, have been here since before the Romans, even before the Phœnicians, have overheard everything, and so know what to say. A visitor moves on at once, in that pervasive odour of holy incense, which he cannot help supposing, because it is everywhere, is a natural emanation from the past.

Nor does it matter which way you turn, for you are sure to get lost. Confused by the romantic signs at every corner of the long, mixed and sombre glory of this occult city, getting lost is quite right. This was a capital of the Goths, portentous early with the row over Arius, for Protestantism began reasonably soon, after the Apostles left it to us to do our best. Then the Emirs and Caliphs came, and protestants of all kinds, for four centuries, had to be tactful. The Christians returned to Toledo a few years after William the Norman landed at Hastings, and the Cid became its Alcaide. Its archbishops began their empire of souls and bodies with an authority few emperors have possessed, or even desired, and ruled for ages with a magnificence which lingers. You enter the remaining glow and shadow of it. The glory of absolute power subdues doubt, but its very glory is the cause of the dread which lives dumbly within the cold gloom it casts.

How appropriate and sonorous, too, are the names of Toledo's archbishops and kings! But only one name in its history, and it was great in the fourteenth century, was homely and genial to this Londoner Samuel Levy. He built a synagogue here, and we may rejoice to-day that he had the money to do it. Samuel was treasurer to Peter the Cruel, and probably knew what must happen to him before long, but his austere and lovely temple survives, and it should

reconcile any just man to the Levys. It is no wonder that Spanish artists, poets and dramatists chose to live and work in Toledo. Yet they were bold men. Their personal magic must have been good, to overcome the whispering of these stones.

The clefts through the ancient masonry of the city wind about, up and down, at haphazard and endlessly. Most of the sunlight is excluded from these passages, but there is a narrow ribbon of hot sky overhead. It is very like the old quarter of an Algerian town, and for the same reason; Arabic is said to have been spoken here till the Armada year, when it was suppressed. The walls usually are as windowless as sheer cliffs, and their doors thick with iron bosses. The houses, for reasons which used to be known within, turn their backs to the street; each house keeps its own share of sunlight in a *patio*, and now and then, from your prison corridor of a street, you may peep through an iron grill in the wall to a fountain in a privy radiance, white doves on its verge, shrubs that are translucent green in that well of day, and Moorish tile-work as rich as the flowers. Nobody is there. It is so still, quiet, and separate, that it might be an unapproachable enchantment.

There was some talk of a cathedral, but no sign of it; to be without purpose beneath the eaves of Toledo was enough. There was no need to hurry. One felt coeval with the stones, and a century or two did not matter. Once we did see a pinnacle lordly in the blue at the end of a lane; that suggested the cathedral, but it went behind a cornice at a turn, and I forgot it again.

So close are the walls, and indeterminate, and secret the quiet, that I was unaware we had freed ourselves from the entanglement at the moment when we opened the right door. There was no warning, that I noticed. We were suddenly released and in the open. We were loosed into a spacious wintry chill, perhaps the original evening of the day when the roof was finished. The extent of that bare disclosure of black and white marble pavement going beyond



sight was incredible within so huddled a city Music was faint and wandering in a vast release

The piers are of granite, pale and emphasised in a dusk, and lift to night When clustered supports rise so lightly to a nebulous vaulting and their repetition suggests infinity, as if you saw the very music—though the sounds are casual, no more than the recollection within the arches and recesses of what was last heard—it is too much for reason If you do not know of an answer to that kind of appeal it is easier not to resist I surrendered No, I'll say I was overcome When nobility is manifest, and we see it will last while there are fellow men, we are supported by more than reason, or reason, sometimes perhaps, is an instinctive perception of validity One is very small on the floor of a Spanish cathedral, and yet the majesty is ours

Somehow we felt afterwards as though we were Toledanos There is an inn, *La Posada de la Sangre*, down a flight of steps and round more corners than I counted, where Cervantes lived and wrote a book about a kitchenmaid The gallery above its courtyard is supported on stone pillars with Ionic capitals The pillars must have been well rubbed when Cervantes leaned on them Some wine barrels were there and donkey's panniers A stately woman, who did not look at us was busy at a stone cistern in a corner, and that courtyard, of course, was the right place for *La Ilustre Fregona* We gazed round, reckoned up our probable years, but doubted that we should become younger if we stayed, though the inn seemed promising

Up the steps is the *Zocodover*, the public square, and the centre of the city's life It was market day By now we knew that our right to be there was fairly sound We sat with the rest, in the sun outside a cafe, not altogether as strangers Across the square is a little tower, with a balcony round it, from which, I was told, names were made public when the Inquisition condemned them We turned our back on it Near us a small man in black velvetens was taking his ease, a broad black hat on the back of his head,

his eyes a pale grey curiously cold in a lean face so tanned. His supple hands, his bared throat and breast, were bronze. He eyed me strictly once, over his wine. I think I would back that chap, for the long run, against all inquisitions; and somehow that confidence was in accord with the inadvertent word of the cathedral.

#### EL GRECO

There is a story that El Greco and Cervantes conversed in Toledo. We may as well believe it: weren't they both there? I fancy Domenico Theotocopuli was the man to know why Don Quixote's countenance was rueful, so he would not have laughed outright. His amusement would have shown in a smile, when alone. He himself had been through something like that; though, for his part, he saw clearly and without complaint what the conflict was about.

And again, while those two men were able to meet, and naturally would come together, it is pleasing to remember that Shakespeare was at work in London. Such coincidences point to a hopeful supposition, which we will not examine meanly, or it might go, that the spirit of life is informed with what has to be done, and occasionally makes a noble effort, to show what could be. We may therefore always watch for that undivulged influence, which draws us on, to lift the tide of life to a record mark some day, and wash out the groundlings.

'When? Next week? Well, we do not expect it early next year. The daily use of the common scene by those who are busily turning it to profitable account moves faith to close the door sadly and quietly; to go inside; to persuade itself, when alone, that after all it is foolish to expect much to come within the measure of three-score and ten, even though a thousand ages are short as a watch that ends the night.

For the trouble is that some Philip II, who is a dolt but has power, and whose honest convictions would perish

verdure, and Their Eminences, whose splendour never satisfies them unless we all go down on our knees to it, and keep down, and the taboos set up for our fears, and this proscription, and that prohibition, and the threat of armed establishments, together as numbing as the black face of doom always and everywhere, allow life the same freedom to its brightest colours and loveliest form that a collier's children get on the dole

Poor little people! Felix, who is moved by the call to joy and bounty, would have agreed to that, but doubt made him hesitate. Part of the old palace in which El Greco lived is preserved in Toledo—or maybe this was a house within the precincts of the vanished palace—and it has a garden, on a height above the Tagus, at the south-west edge of the city. We were in that garden, sitting on a balustrade well up towards the sun. Everything about us suggested that now the tide was due to rise, for we had just seen the collection of the great man's pictures, and had been to Santo Tomé with its *Entierro del Conde Orgaz*, and the roses about us were full. Occasionally, faith in the immortality of virtue transcends sad experience. But Felix is ever wary lest anarchy may lurk in an idea. He does not object to anarchy, yet wonders whether we are yet sound enough for it.

He said he thought it better to endure such as Philip, and with an Inquisition thrown in to make things hotter, than that all we feckless atoms should be loose and adrift, making worse punishment for ourselves than authority would ever inflict.

The archbishops, he reminded me, had the cathedral built. And Philip, who commissioned El Greco to paint the Martyrdom of St Maurice, but who put the picture aside because it conflicted with his mind, which was drab, yet did pay the artist for the expensive ultramarine used in it, as a good patron, he knew that paint costs money. Back on my way well, that, Felix. But these jealous functionaries, taking his ease, prohibit the word, or hide it when published, or so that it is unrecognisable, are as blighting as

frost and green fly. They keep life reduced and confined, if not without legal warrant. A proud governor whose piety made him happier in a dark though sacred closet, and whose sallow thoughts were for acquisition and punishment, would hate the colours and fair augury of El Greco. His inclination would be to turn such work to the wall, for there can be no question about the danger in the free play of light, a fact which is known intuitively by every man whose comfort is in an established order. For that matter, we are all nervous lest our order be disturbed, and stand quiet, though dubiously, when energetic barbarians desire to abolish every liberty. We may be overlooked if not provocative, and our order remain safe, if dead. Man is by nature timid and conservative. That the spirit of life ever got El Greco through to us is a surprise; but it ought not to surprise us that the nature of this survival had but scant notice for centuries.

It is as hard at times to learn what critics of art are talking about as to get the meaning of the noise when literary critics are rattling school desks. Perhaps it has the same importance. Some people fancy that El Greco must have been mad, or at least had distorted vision which he accepted without humorous complaint. When a Christian artist's work is buoyant with the authority and brightness of Iris, unconscious of dispute, it is enough to make a judicious person quizzical. His serene and sparkling levity, as if rapture vivified his brush, seems not of the earth, for it is beyond our experience. You see it in his *Resurrection* in the Prado Museum. The body is imponderable, and rises. The artist did not stop to remind himself of the law which gives matter its weight, compelled thereupon to devise an illusion of what could not happen. The law of the spirit is to triumph; there was nothing for El Greco to argue about. As did Bach, he but rejoiced.

Certainly El Greco was aberrant. That is evident, because if one of us were noticed to be deaf to the day's excitements, and even to the dinner-bell, bemused instead with the

notion that we could see something more important than the day's news, though invisible to the curious stare of other people, then our friends would have cause to grieve El Greco, by that reckoning, had a calenture

Another critic of his, this one a connoisseur and an intractable admirer of the Greek who settled in Spain, does not think so. He is sure that when El Greco gave the religious houses what they thought they wanted he laughed up his sleeve. Moreover, he did not suffer, so thinks his critic, from astigmatism. His etiolated saints were merely conditioned by the long and narrow altar-spaces they had to fill.

To me there seems a very damnable difficulty in laughing up one's sleeve, while painting the consecration and the poet's dream. The deception unluckily, always shows in the result, douses the lamp, and leaves but the usual dull though skilfully accomplished job of work. It is very unfortunate, but the light goes out if you fool with it. These madmen have all the luck. No cynical skill of a mocker could have put that glow behind El Greco's colours, as though they were translucent to the light of a world not this.

And why his saints are as we see them I do not know. It cannot be because they had to fill long and narrow spaces, for at times they are as lanky in a broad space, nor because the eye of the master was askew, because there his figures are, in places, to show that his sight could be as good as that of his critics. I do not know what was the matter with him, except that he could easily manage things that would be miracles if we did them.

It might be as well simply to admit that when an artist evidently knows what we know, yet transcends the fact to make it revelatory, his oddity is but the display of a value which cannot be seen from where we stand. We are not wrong, we are right, within our own confine, but he is aware of an extension invisible to us.

El Greco went to Spain as an alien, and remained one. Yet he conformed even in the Toledo of the Inquisition.

He must have noted the windmills, too, but was not an errant knight; he knew that the grinding of wind may be ignored. He was a quiet citizen, regular in his services. He accepted; it was as futile as ever to kick against the pricks. There was all the freedom he needed in another space, where the usual writs do not run, and he was not likely to be found.

He is still an alien, and startling, when first seen. He has both the intensity of John the Baptist and the gladness of a pagan. His saints may be in part the consequence of astigmatism, but they are dangerous. In their own luminous dimension, so vividly not ours, they ought not to be real, but disconcertingly are. El Greco, with his eyes turned from us, looking to things we cannot see, may be mad; but that is only relative to our good sense, which we prove in the things we do.

#### MIRAGE FROM THE ESCORIAL

At the Escorial, Fabian was missing. I found him sitting with his back to the Palace, considering the pines and boulders of the steep below. "I don't want to go on walking," he explained. "The best thing about this palace is its site—this mountain would be all right without its palace. I'm told it has 10,000 doors, 900 staircases, lots of kings in sarcophagi, 900 miles of corridors, and more glass than all the tomato frames in the Lea Valley. Leave me alone. To-day I don't feel strong enough for the last hundred staircases."

"You haven't been reading that review of your novel, have you? I saw it at the hotel."

"Me? What if I have? After the Vimy Ridge, the critics can do nothing to worry me. Besides, I've always known, without being told, that though some fellows write novels for the fun of it, just as I do, others are born novelists."

"There is a difference. You can tell the native born—usually, apart from their novels, when they venture to write anything else."

"I know. So the critics are silly when they expect a mortal man, who isn't a novelist born, to write a novel as though he were. Why should he, when usually he gets no fun out of novels that are said to have every attribute of genuine fiction?"

"There is a reason for it, Fabian. It is injudicious to ignore the categories of the market. If your book isn't exactly like a novel, how the devil are the stallkeepers to know what to do with it?"

"But I don't want to supply the stalls regularly with goods that have no more doubt about their smell and shape than there is in a trilogy, or three boxes of breakfast food. I couldn't if I tried. I wish I could."

"You need a special gift for it. Besides, there is an orthodoxy of fiction, which you ought not to question, for it is trade custom. Trade customs are never ignored, except by reckless idiots."

"All right. If I do another novel, then once more over the top, my son—straight for the wire. That'll start the automatic guns again. Somebody told me you've tried your hand at fiction. Tell me, what is a novel?"

"I don't know. I fancy nobody knows. But it is supposed, worse luck, to tell a story. For further guidance there are *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Tristram Shandy*, *Pickwick Papers*, *Vanity Fair*, *Moby Dick*, *War and Peace*, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, *Tess*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Penguin Island*, *Mr Jeeves*, *Ulysses*, and *Mrs Dallouay*, and perhaps the *Book of Job*. When you've struck a formula out of that lot, let me see it."

"Let's think that over. Perhaps I shall live some years yet. How long do you guess it ought to take to extract the true form of a novel from your little lot?"

"If we could ask that scientist who was trying to extract sunshine from cucumbers for release in raw and inclement summers, he might be able to tell us. To make matters

Pl— you must have noticed that the cinematograph is. Yet he conlay the deuce with us. Millions of people are

read this,' only to find that it had the consistency and attraction of yesterday's porridge, pale and lumpy Nourishing stuff, too, with treacle, for those who can manage it Not every novelist who is sure he needn't bother about his transitional passages and droughty arcas, in which the urge of his spirit is feeble, has the disarming gusto, the comic spirit sparkling in him from unflagging and uncanny power, of improvident Dickens That fellow went on talking without a stop while adding to the people we know by shaking his sleeves over the floor "

'I think sometimes,' said Fabian, "that the adventuring of the mind in the novel has ceased The urge of our spirit is only for strolling about So much of the writing of fiction seems little more than the designing of labels for seductive confections They stand in rows on the shelves, and stir no emotions, but only a hesitating desire "

'Perhaps because the novel, like the drama, has become solace chiefly It is almost forgotten that the novel is a form of letters Do you know of a character in modern fiction, all of it, who is as notable as Mrs Battle, and will live as long? She was not portrayed by a novelist The writing of fiction is now a trade, with the restrictions compelled by the costly plant needed for the huge and regular supply of an article and its wide distribution It has become a profitable medicine for the multitude which suffers from speed, noise, and anxiety Readers need soothing, and the novel is for that "

'So it should be I don't object to that Soft bodies made miserable by monotonous wheels going round ought to get anodyne in printed matter They must have the stuff—they ought to have it The writers who give it to them deserve the bays Anything that helps is good to have "

"Well, they get it, with other balm and physics But the careless benevolence of the critics, some of whom supply the stuff, is another theme In time, they forget they are serving letters, and not the trade I'm not blaming them—they've every excuse—the wheels go too fast for everybody Still, the unique quality of such a writer as Stella



Benson all but vanishes in the flood with the truth that the novel is not always a commodity, but is sometimes a book. The virtue of her civilising wit is lost to sight, except that a few anxious watchers hail a treasure just showing now and then in the hurrying flotsam. . . . And as a standard of values is involved, don't you think that for critics as well as writers this becomes a matter of conscience? Yet here we are, a new vast reading public has been discovered, and so far it is *shy of anything but fiction*. It knows nothing of literature and the arts. It is only since the year before last that everybody learned to read. And that new reading public is not only of immense value to the book trade, it is the deciding power in a society distracted by conflicting opinions in the very crisis when anarchy is once more in conflict with law for possession of us. There is a general uprising against civility. Not Athens now, but Timbuctoo again. That ought to draw the attention of any sort of writer. The problems of only a novelist are involved in movements which are throwing up the forgotten rough stuff from the bottom. The bully gets the delightful right to wallop intelligence, which once kept him in order, and then fancies he can beat Jove in chucking thunderbolts. If our genial and sentimental novelists and critics cannot see what is upon us then their charming pages will soon be as useful as the paper where the picnic was held last summer. It is time we were ready for the Plug-Uglies. It ought to be something to us when brutes would stable in the temple."

"It is. I should like to be younger," said Fabian. "Is England to be the last ditch? Good for us then. We can do it. We ought to have known that the first casualty in a war to make the world safe for democracy would be the private soul. It was. It fell with the opening of gunfire—not even decently buried—kicked into a ditch. And now, of course, the temple is threatened. All right, we'll see about that. . . . I say, though—shall we win?"

"If we don't, we shall go back to feathers and wampum. There are problems enough for a novelist to-day, when

the challenge to him is to give up his brains. A novel, we know, should tell a story, but what a very rum story it could be, with reality as it is!"

"Yes, and dangerous for whoever does it, and unsettling for whoever understands. Yet what is all this fuss about a story? The novel is narration. So is the essay, and I'd say that both are autobiography, the critical relation of selected experience, should that have significance for others."

Fabian, you're in luck then. Have another cut at it. You are called to-day for one more effort, still another little attempt on chaos and old night!"

Here, easy. I've had enough of war. Our holidays are not over, are they? What's more, I thought you were all for the tradition, and for peace and quiet. Now you talk like a sergeant-major at the battle-station."

"Well, our tradition is threatened. You know it is. Yet the matter is a bit difficult. Can tradition and free thought be reconciled? The knot does look hard to untie. I've never been quite able to get it straight. But I remember hearing of a master-mariner of the forties. He may help us."

"That man would take his departure from a Cornish headland, bound towards the Hoogly. For months he would not see land—not a loom of it. He would have to judge leeway, keep to the rating of the chronometers, solve his doubts of the compass. His only support was his faith in his seamanship, his science in the use of the charts, in weather-lore, and in reading the sun, moon and stars. He was a lonely man, the responsibility was his. He had to keep the right course, as near as he could judge it, by the use of his mind upon the discoveries science had made in the navigation of a ship. Many days he would not have a sight of a heavenly body, while his ship drove on through gloom and uproar. To all appearance he was lost."

"One night that ship's master would appear on the quarter deck, and say to the officer of the watch: Send a man into the fore-rigging. The Hoogly light should be showing. Still, the starboard bow."

"Up the man would shin, and he would be hardly aloft before he would sing out: 'Light on the starboard bow, two points!'

"No anarchy there. No trusting solely to intuition and the divinity of the instincts. No deference to the mob or any other authority. Only the bold and skilful use of the best knowledge, the individual reason against all the powers, and a strict regard, in solitude, for the traditional code of his craft. That is how he found his mark. He discharged his responsibility to society that way."

#### LA MANCHA

Our motor-bus, the same old ruin which would not assemble for any man except its young driver, but would fly for him when he winked, began a long run through La Mancha, across Castile to Andalusia. We were bound for somewhere over the Sierra Morena.

Though we viewed it only from a bus, La Mancha, said to be a dry and obdurate region, was as much like lofty morning as any land I have seen. The bus itself, of course, was only a lunacy of ours intruding into a space where time had made no difference. We felt a little ashamed of it. We ought to have been on horseback, without knowing and not caring when we should reach any particular place. Spain does not attempt to keep pace with the latest speed; it invites dawdling and ease, but go on if you must.

Often we wished to stop, for we saw hamlets and people that suggested we could do no better whatever distance we covered that day, but our engine merely hooted and flew on. Has our newly acquired ability to get right off the earth, or, at the least, when travelling, to have pneumatic insulators between us and the earth which streams by as a fleeting illusion, anything to do with our discontent? Something we seem to have lost, anyhow, which used to be as right as meat and drink; though we cannot stop to look for it. We fly on.

Surprisingly, the tousled black head over the wheel in front of us, after some hours, made a proud flourish, as does an organist at his grand finale. The bus stopped. We alighted, now there was a chance. Everything at once was still. There was no sound. There was a hawk hovering over a hole province of corn. The full weight of the sun fell on us, and we bowed to it, like the corn. I heard we were near Manzanares. The only cloud over the land, for none was in the sky, accompanied the drift of a flock of sheep as a high column of dust. This was Cervantes' country, still with its wheat and barley, olives and vineyards, on a thirsty brown earth. We had our feet on that earth now, things were close and did not stream past, and they became serious.

I could see at once, for instance, why the Knight mistook sheep in the distance for an army on the march. It was a natural mistake. Anyone here might make it. Don Quixote, at Manzanares, became as logical as the gravest Premier, and his errors and self-deception just as explicable. All evidence accorded with his faith. A little windmill stood not far away, beyond some olives. It had an outlandish and insulting pose. That attack on a windmill was as excusable as a charge of political eloquence down on this or that, an inevitable indiscretion. The man being what he was, and the windmills of La Mancha what they are, the outcome was as likely as whatever moves us to admit that the activity of a rational government is only what we expected. Cervantes was as artful as Shakespeare, he knew what he was tilting at. He had experienced the resistance of the world. While bent and toiling over the earth, he had been forced to observe clods very closely. The daily scene was no joke, but he turned it into great fun, because it is better to laugh than to get angry with the way of things.

A sporadic group of buildings within white walls, perhaps a large farmhouse, stood back from the road. Our invasion of its gates did not appear to surprise the people who met us. We might have been there the day before and here we

were again. They did not repeat the welcome, but we could see we had a right to be there. An elderly man and his wife, a tough and homely pair, who had probably remained at the same age while their grandchildren began to overtake them rapidly, were no more put out by our arrival, and showed no more fuss, than the hawk over their corn; their maids stood in the background fixed in curiosity. The man had a word with his wife, who at once shot commands at the group behind, and disappeared with them.

Our host led us through a dark corridor, illuminated mainly by reflections from old china and copper utensils hanging on the walls, into a small *patio*, which was roofed with a grape vine on a lattice. The floor was flagged. A table was there, with a white cloth. The man brought out a generous flagon of wine. The sunlight, filtered by the live canopy, was greenish and cool, but it splashed through holes in the screen and made a bright chequer and filigree on the linen. Suspended from the vine, as orderly as lanterns, were young bunches of jade beads.

The man told us of his crops. He had grown to a good age there himself, through many difficulties, so I suppose he would know how the roots of olives prefer to go. He was looking to a future which, for all his toughness, he could not reach; he had planted more trees. I saw no clock in that house, and remembered that public clocks in Spain are scarce. What do olive trees, planted for the future, want with clocks? I thought this man would never be rich, no matter how he planted, but he was as independent of an Economic Conference as his dogs. He represented, like his brown earth, a substantial and enduring Spain. While he talked, and we ate, our stout but limber hostess, who now honoured us with her best dress, stood and gossiped with a traveller at the other end of the table, while directing her maids with her eyes. She spoke so quietly that I could not hear her voice, but to see the gracious play of her hands, and the slight movements of her head while sensibility changed her expression into smiles or shade, would have

given the heart of a perishing lawyer more warmth and juice. Felix and Fabian were watching her as if here was shrewd and good-natured Demeter, now a little grey, but in a new silk shawl, its fringes in concert with the recital of her hands. Robin had slanted his glass of wine in a ray from the lattice overhead, and seemed trying to divine the meaning of the ruby anagram thrown on the cloth. He was unaware that he fitted nicely into a group which, in that setting, he so much admires in an old master.

Our driver joined us, or rather stood at a door, and gave us a remorseless look. He put his foot through the picture. We must go. There was yet a long way to go.

That bus soon became the deserved purgatory for fools who never know when they are well off but must set out, with frivolous minds, for something different. Robin, of course, sank his chin on his necktie, and slept. His conscience is of teak and bound in brass. The punishment of Ixion would not worry him: he would wake up at the end of eternity and ask, as a sound journalist, How many revolutions in that lot? The rest of us oscillated in resignation.

I had forgotten that we must cross the Sierra Morena, for the long shadowless plain had flattened consciousness, so the abrupt change disturbed when we entered a forbidding gorge, mounted towards corners that ended on sky, and dared the wheels on a verge where monstrous crags overhung deeps that fell to zero. Felix, looking over the side for a bottom he could not see, remarked that this was the scene of Don Quixote's penance among the boulders, after his adventure with the madman, and without doubt the Knight could very easily have performed penance there by sitting quiet where Sancho left him till he was fetched. All his sins would have come back to him in that wilderness.

Night fell, and still we poured on and on. Instinct told us that our driver was lost, and instinct was right. But he never paused. His blessed machine had swilled at the petrol fount of eternal motion, we could leave it only if we leapt overside into the dark. We should never stop again. Perhaps

the mad spirit of those mountains had tanked both engine and driver. We arrived at wrong towns, glad of their lamps, but saw them fade behind us. Once, once only, we were in luck. Our flying prison stuck in a narrow alley at a bend in a village, nobody knew where. We were not sorry to be witnesses, at that hour, of the death of the brute, though we condoled with its driver, who certainly loved it. He merely grinned, shook his locks from his eyes, and his familiar obeyed him as if stone walls were immaterial, when he willed it. We were off again.

When hope was far astern, and we had ceased to care about what would happen next, our driver stopped. No reason showed. It was a small and lampless town, but perhaps he had resolved to give his poor wheels a rest. This town would have to do. There might be an empty barn in it. We were told it was Ubeda, and a hasty reference, with a lighted match, to a guide-book showed that Ubeda was not worth mentioning. But it was all we should get; our driver was outside, lighting a cigar.

We found ourselves beneath a long and venerable building, of the Renaissance, as well as it could be seen in the dark, but an architectural study was not what we wanted: though I could stand upright, if I did not try to do more. Somebody said that this was the palace of a marquis, and named him to us, but I have forgotten his name; he has been dead several centuries.

Would our honours care to sleep there? This suggestion by folly, when we were numbed, was untimely, but we went inside.

The interior expanded into mysterious vistas, in the way of an alcazar; and as if the marquis had ordered long ago that nothing should ever be changed, only his ancient candelabrum was doing its best over an austere court. It was not easy to believe anything there. I noticed a vague upper gallery, from which bodiless faces peered down at us.

Something queer had happened. Had we got into the wrong period? The costumes of the ladies who welcomed

us helped to this doubt, though they were as delightful as figures in a dream sometimes can be, or perhaps all was well, and we had only interrupted a dress rehearsal of an old drama in the very home of its original. It was hard to tell which, for that palace was as baffling as unreadable antiquity usually is when you don't know where you are. I remember no more of that night.

#### DEVOTIONS AT UBEDA

When I woke the house was there. It was veritable, if Fabian singing while he shaved at a mirror the marquis had left on the wall meant anything. Our apartment suggested, too, that a venerable mansion in Spain has an affinity with morning which the best of flats in the Marylebone Road cannot claim. That marquis must have known how to live and what to have about him, he had the space and leisure to be civilised. His house, though, his turned democratic, and is a *parador* for travellers, he builded better than he knew.

The brightness of that morning was rare, and evaded definition. The right things were enhanced in it. It was of the kind which you see when you wake with the superstitious conviction that all is well, unless it be spoiled. I went to a window. The foliage in the *plaza* had not moved yet. The day was not two hours old. The eastern sky was clear gold, and alive and shrill with wheeling swifts. An aromatic wood was burning.

Haven't you been looking for this for years? said Fabian. 'Shall we go out and put sand in our engine?'

It was Sunday. You could see that, without referring to a calendar. Even maniacal engines should be given no sand on a Sunday?

"All right," said Fabian, "then suppose we go out and pray for all machinery? Let us ask the good God to turn the wheels the right way—men ought to know they can get this jolly slant on the job."



Only the swifts answered him. I am not sure about Fabian's economics, but it is certain that anyone who has not heard the music of the spheres has not the ear for it.

The house was silent, and appeared to be deserted. Only the faint smell of a wood fire showed that it was alive. We went about it quietly, and could not find a pillar, door, or handrail, that was not in concert. The interior, nearly all of stone, was cool, but the opened main door framed intense day outside, with a white ass tethered to a post.

There was a church, the Capilla del Salvador, across the square. Its west front was in shadow. The sun had not had time to get down to the base, but the tawny walls were releasing some of the glow they had been absorbing for centuries. The tower was high in the morning, and snapdragon flowered on its upper ledges.

Priests were celebrating within. Fabian commended the purity of the notes of the choristers, and was charmed to hear that their voices were pagan; they might have been singing in a grove. However that may be, I could acknowledge the beauty and dignity of a ritual I do not well know. There were three worshippers, and we two observers. As it happened, the tinkling of the Sanctus bell did not disagree with the snapdragon on the tower. The priests at their ancient rite, so much more ancient than their old church, affected us, in that setting, in a way for ever beyond the scope of the most brilliant actor manager. This disturbed, one did not know why, though we did not pause to reflect on that. Very likely it was the voices of the boys about the vaulting shafts. The reason why beauty affects us is never very clear, and it is not worth while stooping to look for it. The invocation of the unseen by hapless men, yet with a decision in faith which comes of familiarity with an ancient ritual where the very walls and piers lift like praise, and to music, must stir even a witness who is a stranger, standing apart. I felt this, watching a girl in black kneeling on the stones with her arms outstretched to the sanctuary; and then turned to peer into a gloomy chapel beside me.

An image, the size of life, hung within, rueful on its cross, its crown awry, its beard dusty, and wearing a pair of purple silk pantalets. Its tawdry finery in neglect was worse than the realistic wound in its side.

We got out of it. We stood listening to the swifts, trying to recover an earlier poise. How long can the morning promise be kept?

We moved away from that church in something like dismay. What music and what ritual could redeem so casual yet dismal an offence? If it did not mean dry-rot at the heart then it had no meaning, which is worse. That idol, we fancied, was as stultifying, because it was of the same order, as the ugly images which prompt state-mongers to consider in solemn conferences what they must do to suppress earth's bounty, and how to avoid peace while seeming to promote it. We have such buildings, named as rightly as *Salvador*, and such a message to deliver therein, and then empty the beauty of both with advertisements that would bankrupt the shop-window display of a dealer in underclothes. The priesthood must fear the bold and reviving word, fear it as much as do statesmen when formulating devices to help mankind. We know those devices. They agree that the only way to use the result of sun and rain upon the earth is to check fruitfulness, for our benefit, while protecting the perishing harvests with hedges of bayonets.

Yet we are told there must be a revival of faith! What, in an image in purple drawers and a crown hanging loose? That suggests instead another and permanent crucifixion, and no hope of a resurrection. Besides, it may not help us to revive faith in sacrifice when the earth now is fairly soaked with the blood of our offerings to this lovely image and that. Nothing seems to come of it but the plague. Most people have the stink of it in their nostrils, and are wondering whether the air will ever again be fresh and cool with day-spring. It is certain we shall see no advent while continuing to give to dead forms the homage due to spirit. Elaborating

more industriously on the old base of our affairs will not give again today the appearance of good fortune. Instead, that may bring down on us night absolute. But if we had another standard of values!

Though what is it we want? Who knows? It is beginning to look as if we must either change our idols or let our temples founder in another onset of the desert. It is sure to prove impossible, whatever our sincerity, to live in an age of science with the images and impulses usual to savages. We may not find salvation, but only dismay and horror, in the use of the powers that are ours if we pray for only greater cunning in their traditional use. That would be no happier than dressing the familiar image in a more fashionable style. What does the image represent? We need not rightly adjust its crown unless our answer leaves the morning clear of fear and guns.

Robin and Felix heard the question asked as we strolled across the square to the inn. What's all this about? They were standing by the post where the ass was tethered.

Our doubt was explained to them, but Robin only chuckled. "Let's ask this chap," he said, drawing the donkey's ear through his hand. "He is said to have had an early word about it."

#### CORDOVA

While the earth has ills innate which no bright morning can cheer, it is strange that men should labour to extend and deepen its shadows. You would think we could be content with our fated condition, from which not even the gods can lift us. When a blind child grieves because it cannot see the flowers, its sorrow is all it will get.

But when, from another and a better vantage, we learn that so many of our troubles are contrived, and are unbecoming to intelligence, and that it rests solely with ourselves whether or not we let all slip down to Gehenna, to stay there, then what a likely place earth is, if only we could find the mind for a new attempt upon it! We were travelling

through the valley of the Guadalquivir, and a guide-book had told us that we should see only a hot and dreary barren

Very likely it is that, when compared with what it was when the Arabs ruled it, for Cordova under its Caliphate in the tenth century was the most civilized city in Europe. The Moors left this region a garden, but the reforming swords of the Christians were not the proper tools for irrigation works, which therefore lapsed. Because water failed, the trees died, so the climate changed, and the barren reappeared. The same religious severity destroyed the public baths in Cordova, and abolished the libraries and the learning with the trees

As we saw the valley, its corn, olives, vineyards, oranges and pomegranates were sufficient to lessen the threat of stony barrens, should we ever cease to be eager for the punishment of opinions not ours, and should we lose our fear when faced by knowledge which is strange. As a barren place this was doing as well as was asked of it.

Cordova itself, so the legend also went, has been but the sad ghost of itself for many centuries, and becomes fainter. We were warned to expect a city long in decay, with tombs and memories for its chief pleasures. Robin reminded us, not altogether as evidence of what is called Progress, of those stepping-stones of our dead selves by which we rise to higher things and come to be where we are, that Cordova under the Moors had nine hundred public baths and seventy public libraries, one with enough manuscripts to start a civilization with all its requirements, about a thousand years before borough councils and Mudie and Boot began to do what they could for us; and perhaps we are too ready to suppose that we left the heathen nowhere on the day when we could go to the Derby by train

At first it did appear as if we could say farewell to Cordova soon after our driver had backed round. Not so much as a tomb was showing, and no more use for memory than what is wanted of it in a new multiple store. Robin, who is fond and curious about origins, saw Arabian blood in the

noses and stature of the men about the streets, and in the eyes of the ladies, for he was anxious that our visit should not be wasted; and we agreed with him, to save argument, as the morning was hot. The Moors certainly have left words for use in most of the old crafts of Spain—our own cordwainer is from Cordova, once famous for its leather—yet words keep their impress longer than race, and ten centuries is all the time ardent men and women need to make a general average statement of most of the pure blood in Europe.

The city became itself as soon as we left a modern thoroughfare, and turned into a tangle of footpaths; it began to promise that the longer we stayed the more it might allow. In those aimless causeways with whitewashed walls, hot and arid enough, we saw that the Moorish delight in water and gardens has not quite dried up. The instinct survives, though parched, and might grow with good effect whenever a chance for its refreshment returns. At frequent intervals in the unlikely walls, pictures were recessed, courtyards with rosy overfalls of bougainvillea and plantains throwing green arches. The *patios* of the poor, more numerous, were enclosures of the sub-tropics. We entered one, which was overlooked by the windows of many families. Here there was a communal effort. Its women were slapping linen at its fountain. Vines and shrubs were growing wherever there was standing room, and flowers streamed from every sill. We were told there were annual prizes for the best *patios* in the city. Then this must have taken the first? No, your honour, the sixth.

It is just as well to be reminded that with a half-promise of security in a barrow-load of mould, the pleasure men find in gardens is as native as the sun they find, when the weather is suitable, in concrete gun-emplacements. Human nature cannot be changed. We are assured of that daily by those who perhaps dread their affairs might not go as well as formerly if we ceased to be obedient simpletons; and again it is so easy for us, when disappointed, to agree

on the absence of hope. We always admit that nothing in human nature that is good can change for the better yet who really doubts that our nature can be readily changed, from bad to worse? How pessimistic are the gin makers over our virtues, and how rich!

The great mosque at Cordova, now its cathedral, which once made the city the rival of Mecca, is still called La Mezquita, though it is consecrated to the Virgin. The exterior is unpromising. There is a surround of masonry of great height built during the Caliphate, massive, buttressed, and battlemented, because there is nothing like a hearty insistence on God the Compassionate for raising hell and huge gates that are oriental in style, but of the fourteenth century, when the Moors had gone. To muddle matters a trifle further, some Roman milestones, found on the old road from Cordova to Gades (which we call Cadiz) are embedded here and there.

There is no expectation of anything good when going from the narrow street through the Gate of Pardon, so the spaciousness of the Courtyard of the Oranges is a surprise. Palms and orange trees are in parallel rows, and once, we hear, their boles carried peeps into the mosque, through the colonnades within but not to-day, for most of the gateways into the building are walled up. Central in the great *patio* is a fountain which was placed there by a caliph in the eighth century. That courtyard with its light and shade, the voices of children playing in the cloisters, and the women with their pots gossiping at the fountain, caused us to lose our curiosity in the Holy of Holies. There was no wonder in it, only restfulness, and the impression of continuity. We had time to look round and to read that Seneca and Lucan were born in Cordova, and that on this site, before Tarik crossed from Africa to begin an Arabic culture in Europe, was the Visigothic church of St. Vincent. A woman laughed over at the fountain.

I noticed on an ancient door jamb, as we entered the mosque an indecent scrawl, date about yesterday or the

day before. At the verge of the interior we instinctively paused before venturing further. Only gradually did the twilight allow definition to the shapes ahead, and permit us with patience to see deeper and deeper into a forest of pillars, though not to the end of it. The silence, the dusk, and that uniformity of stems lost in suggested arches close overhead, was so like a first glance into the severity of the jungle that it brought us to a stand. What ought one to do here?

The monotony of the shapes in a space which seemed endless, with night waiting just overhead, had the same effect as that reading of history which tells of cycles, by which a civilisation is always returned to the point from which it set forth, and so comes to nothing but the need to begin another cycle, if it can.

The truth is, the great mosque is but an architectural ghost, and its silence is not of proud accomplishment, but only the inability of a skeleton to speak. The pavement, now brick, or nondescript, once was mosaic. There are still about a thousand pillars, but the original open-work ceiling, which was richly carved and painted, is nearly all hidden by an absurd eighteenth-century cross-vaulting. It is said that suspended from the flat roof, when the Moors were here, were thousands of lamps. One has to imagine them, a difficulty in the dark.

There is enough, however, to hint at the first splendour of the place. The pillars are monolithic, and of an extraordinary diversity of colour and material, jasper, marble, breccia, and porphyry. The capitals are as diverse. Most of the shafts are simple, but some are twisted; and I noticed that ministrants of another ritual here, in the neighbourhood of an altar, are in the habit of resting their lighted tapers against their near shafts, especially those that are fluted or twisted, blackening and splintering them. It is what is left of the prayer-niches of the Moors that say most of what we have lost. One would find it hard to believe that the artists who created that secluded lacework of gems were

of a culture supported chiefly by intrigue, torture, treachery and the scimitar and then one remembers the nobility of Gothic, and by what methods, at times, the authority of Jesus has been impressed on the memory of the careless

To return to the brightness of the courtyard was a relief. If, when inside the mosque, one pardons much because of the survival of those exquisite recesses where the caliphs used to pray, yet, when one turns about, there in the centre of the old building is the intrusive lustiness of the Renaissance cathedral. No getting round that. When Charles V came here in 1526, he is reported to have said to the Cathedral Chapter, 'You have built what you or others might have built anywhere, but you have destroyed something that was unique in the world.'

We mentioned this to a Spanish friend. He agreed, 'Yes, he confessed the cathedral is very bad, but it is lucky. Let us thank the Virgin but for her, there would be no mosque. It would have been destroyed. Her altar saved it. And he added, eagerly, a peseta for your old mosaics! Look at that!'

Already we were looking. A peasant girl was moving from the fountain towards the Gate of Pardon. She had the cut and trim of the lady, who had no past, in the original garden, though her body was more secret. She bore a brown jar on her head without knowing it was a burden.

#### OUTLOOK ON THE SIERRA MORENA

The Alcaide of Cordova, or perhaps an alcalde, had sent us an invitation, and with it good news of Montilla, a local wine with a bouquet of its own. My room in the city gave me a long view of the Sierra Morena. Its window was high above the town. Perhaps those lights changing on the sierra would be equal to the almond smell of Montilla. The air of Cordova is remarkably clear, and the definition of the mountains was acute. It was cool up there, too, and I was growing curious about the news that should be coming



from the north. What was happening to the Economic Conferences? (Well, any excuse for solitude, now and then.)

I knew already that if in London the discussion by men of all nations about the best way to light a steady lamp for mankind was disheartening with its suggestion of a brawl in a power-station, in Spain the noise was much less, and only fitful. A casual glance shows that these Spanish newspapers give more attention to *los toros* than to New York and London, and perhaps they are right. British and French newspapers, in the south of Spain, are usually a week old. One day you are cheered with a newspaper from London which is confident that all is well; at a meeting of the Powers, though each is pursuing its own path to good fortune, hoping that its humane generalities in public will disguise its real intent, yet somehow all the diplomatists have become surprisingly sociable on the same road.

At the next halt you learn that Sir John Simon is flying desperately to Geneva to save something or other; and well you know he will fail, because he never flies when he gets there. This lapse has a benefit. Piquancy is added to the publication of solemn nonsense when the days of the week come along mixed and late. The stuff seems more entertaining that way, and nearer the truth of the matter.

To get the news in the form of jig-saw fragments without a clue, and to watch sunburnt and dusty peasants leisurely conjuring grain, oil, and wine out of the marl of a shadeless land, presently slows urban thoughts down to the pace of the mules and asses moving through sere herbage, carrying loads as though used to the fate of burdens, towards far ridges which in that glow could be stages in eternity. You also slow down to the measure of a land which might be contributing nothing to the wealth of the world except barvests that ripen in their due season; nothing at all to the study of economics. You forget there is a need to fly to Geneva or anywhere else.

In such a grateful leisure, with the mountains so lucid, odd thoughts afflict you. Why, let us suppose the sun,

being innocent, ripens corn merely for food, and not for any other profit? I wondered whether the London Conference had thought of that, in its unanimous opinion that goods are not good unless profitably scarce, that good is bad, when it is plentiful, that good should be destroyed when there is enough of it for all, and is therefore unsuitable. Could not conferences give notice to the sun? Less fertility, if you please! Not so much of your impartial generosity; it needs controll! This fecundity is contrary to the science of economics—look at the way you upset our rates of exchange!

Since we control nature, cannot we choke off a little the heat of the sun, and adulterate the merit of rain? Why not try? That problem ought not to be beyond the combined wit of Wall and Threadneedle Streets, of Downing Street and Washington. If reducing the earth nearer to the stoniness of a barren, where prices would be high and helpful, is the way of political sagacity, then plainly the armament contractors are right in their devices, for the enlargement of lyddite on the communications of mankind, to quicken the slow and meagre effects of quotas, embargoes, and other judicious hundrares to commerce, would bring the barren about us, and high prices, much sooner than we could dare hope for in the present rate of our drop towards the New Jerusalem.

When Alice went through the looking-glass, objects became not more queer than they are when viewed by a traveller who has made an instant escape from the urgent and alarming affairs of the world into Spain. There is that great mosque we have wandered in to-day. I noticed that not one of our party made a comment on it. We were all a little troubled. What are the implications and historical relevance of those recent scrawls upon a thousand-year-old Moorish pillar? I had become curious, and went from pillar to post, collecting inscriptions. On one was, Death to the Pope, as though on the fence of a Belfast shipyard, instead of in a Catholic cathedral. On another, Long Live Com-

munism, as though this were Moscow. A beggar interrupts while you are deciphering what is probably a Fascist comment; and below that is written an obscenity. The organ solemnly groans in the central choir. What is history when its lessons are ordered by reason? For this building in the eighth century expressed the desire of Abd-er-Rahman for a western Mecca. It increased for centuries under other caliphs. In 1236 it was taken from the Moors by Ferdinand the Pious, and was consecrated to the Virgin de la Asuncion. Within it to-day the citizens of Cordova scribble their views of Fascism on its twice-holy marble, with comments on other still more objectionable themes. Progress? Stay there long enough, and you feel that all our conferences are already with yesterday's seven thousand years, and so give no attention to the date of the news you find on the hotel table. Time and progression cease to mean what they did, when you peer into a forest of diminishing columns in that mosque, as into a prospect, fading to indistinction, of human aspirations, dreams, and frustration. Frustration? Perhaps that is inherent in some human desires; what we desire may have much to do with a following sense of futility. Luckily, however, women can still gather with their water-jars about the caliph's holy fountain, and know of something to laugh about.

When our current daylight, in which things are under our eyes, can show almost as many views of the same scene as there are witnesses, it would be unfair to expect history to be as simple and veridical as a house-number. By night-fall, our own day seems only to have added to the tangle of the historic controversies. Very possibly that is because we are reasoning animals. When logicians take hold of a simple thread of good at very many points, and with opposing emotions so sincerely felt that each knows he is right, then we ought to expect that they will ravel the good till we can easily mistake it for evil.

This long confusion of rapid Spanish impressions, politics, art, wine, mosques, cathedrals, and a welter of humanity

with so rich, varied, and ancient a story that it might be as easily understood by a pedlar as an eminent statesman, kept me awake at Cordova, for I was doing what I could to find clues to it in some volumes of history. But no light appeared to be in those books, and at last I abandoned the search, and prepared to sleep. It must be getting late. It was useless to study this any longer. Out went the lamp of to-night.

At that moment I noticed the window-blind had somehow changed. It ought to have been unseen, but instead it was a faint illumination to the room I had darkened. This was odd, so I went over and pulled it aside.

The streets of Cordova could be seen down there, though they were delicate and hardly more than frail outlines. The heavy volumes of history were refuted. Either nothing had ever happened below, or else all had gone but the ghost of the stage, either the liveliness of men had not begun, or there must be a new play intended. Beyond the city, above the dark mass of the mountains, day was rising, and so high, assured, and clear, that you could believe Cordova would now be discovered, that a beginning was at hand, and light for it was coming.

#### A SPANISH ROAD

A party of gipsies filed by along the road waste, perched on highly decorated mules. The women were not soberly dressed, as Spanish peasants usually are, but brightened the solitude with orange and crimson, the smiling procession went by as with banners.

There are few carts on Spanish roads, and rarely anyone afoot, except goatherds. But now and then, for a mile or two, we had a near view of what a medieval road was like when a cavalcade was heading for Canterbury. Beyond the pilgrims, set back from the road at the distance where illusion begins, would be a little walled town among the olives, a white town, minarets like masts above its flat roofs,

and one gate facing us, a black aperture because of the shadow beyond, and nobody there.

Perhaps those long lines of Spanish folk, mounted on mules and asses, were on a pilgrimage to a fair or market. They were not like the *gitanos*. They did not smile their interest. They showed no interest at all, and usually only the children gave us a glance. A man would ride with his wife and child on the same mule, two boys following on a donkey. Their dogs would be with them. Rarely a horseman would pass, and he would not ride as though sitting on a rail, but as a *caballero* should. We turned our heads regretfully as those pilgrims went by, and also to the inviting white town beyond them.

We envied the *caballeros*. There are good horses in Spain; or possibly their action had a suggestion of the dignity which freedom gives, for they were but glimpsed from the window of a bus which was directly and swiftly pursuing its schedule. Those riders were untrammelled by time-tables. We were slaves to one, as ever, bound to wheels that were governed by a chronograph. Only intolerance, it must be admitted, would deny the elegance and tractability of a modern car, with its space-devouring power, yet a lacquered and crystal door, though one own it, cannot be as friendly as a horse's flank, when he turns his head to see you are there.

So our bus treated Spain as a historian does humanity. It went from one cathedral to the next, and most of the minor towns and the common people in between the lordly towers were not seen, except by chance and in surprise. How rarely we wonder out of what honest and habitual activities those august spires arose! As seldom do we wonder whether the victims of a great victory ever cursed glory!

Felix exclaimed, for he saw a strange hawk go over a field of maize, and he is a friend of the birds; but I didn't notice it, because a boy sat on a tussock by the wayside with his chin in his hands, in the midst of a flock of black goats, who looked up at us cordially, though he did not move his elbows from his knees; who regarded us, it seemed

to me, from a distance more remote in time than the oldest castle in Spain

'The Giralda!' cried Robin, at that moment

There it was, there was Seville. It was still far off. It was no more than a pale shimmer in the heat under a range of hills, but its famous tower was marked. For a spell the city remained merely a faint suggestion, a prompting by a word of half-forgotten things. Seville! Yet it was useless, the attempt to do this moment justice, to persuade memory to come out plain, because as soon as an image grew to an almost recognizable shape the bus struck a rough patch and rudely bumped it off.

There was no chance to find an appropriate mind for Seville before we arrived, and we were hardly into the place than we pulled up at a hotel recent and upstanding enough to make forgetfulness of historical glamour absolute. Even some palm trees gave no help. The newness of the hotel abolished all but this year of grace, with which it perfectly complied, so it was a happy moment when the latest thing in electrical lifts jibbed in its shaft, and refused the persuasion of a staff of expert technicians. We completed the journey towards the roof of the hotel on a common ladder.

It was evening. There was nothing to be heard in solitude but the diminished sounds of a strange city far below. To-morrow would do for that place. Then Fabian entered my room, as bright and quick as if with good news. 'Never mind that bag, come to the balcony!' From that shelf beneath the parapet of the hotel we saw a long reach of the Guadalquivir brightly mapped, and along its quays were ships moored stem to stern.

We had reached the sea again. I had forgotten about that, in a bus, Columbus had a triumph here, of course, on his return from his first voyage, when the Sevillanos turned out to see him pass through, on his way to Ferdinand and Isabella, with parrots and monkeys and selected Indians bedizened with ostentatious gold ornaments.

Across the river was a white schooner. A steamer was

close to the hotel, with yellow upper-works. There was a wreath of steam from her vermilion and black funnel. Men were busy aft, and on her fo'castle head. She was alive; she was outward bound.

A little up-river from the steamer was an extraordinary landmark. We learned that it was the Torre del Oro, for we went out at once to see it closely, and the near ships. The strange tower was only the office of the harbour-master, though once it was a defending barbican of the Moorish Alcazar; and later, when Seville was the seat of the Tribunal de las Indias, this tower was the first warehouse for the bullion from the New World. The galleons from Puerto Bello and Cartagena must have moored where the steamer with the red funnel was now hauling off, while we watched the ritual of departure. She had the right sunset for opening the western ocean.

Robin and Felix were waiting for us, and with impatience. Where had we been? "Ships?" reproached Robin, "what's the matter with Limehouse Reach? We don't want steamers now, we want the Calle de las Sierpes. You've never heard of it? Where were you raised? There is no other street on earth like it."

On our way, we were charged by clanging trams, and rattle-boxes drawn by horses. Seville was certainly a vivacious city, and was beginning to light up. Above us, after one escape from a train, we came out before a paramount uprising of fretted rock, the cathedral, the last of day caught in its pinnacles, and that would have put the thought of the supernal in anyone but travellers hurrying to find a famous alley that was full of confidential taverns.

We hit by luck upon Sierpes, and every pub in it was shut. Its narrow footway was not gay with promenaders. It was deserted. It was as merry as a Glasgow street on the Sabbath. Robin feared that the Spanish, following their revolution, had turned Presbyterian, but two policemen, who had Sierpes to themselves, told us this was not so. "Communists shot a deputy here, and he was buried to-day."

## SEVILLE

The Sevillanos say, in effect, that unless you have visited their city you have had no occasion to wonder. They have enough reason for a boast. Of Seville, one is glad that among the animating chances in a lifetime that city was part of the good luck. A second visit, for an indefinite stay, would be worth the effort, and you cannot declare that of most of the atlas.

Spain is a land of confused values. Its enchantment is apt to confuse one's own standards, and even cause regret that one's way of life, long established, cannot now allow the attraction of Spain to have its way. I felt this one morning on my way to Seville's post office, through glancing at a building which is inconspicuous because near to the master-ship of the cathedral. On the architrave of the entrance to this building—which is retired a little, as it should be, from the stream and noise of to-day's traffic—are the words, *Archivo General de Indias*.

That brought me to a stand. I did not go in. Too late, now! What would have happened to me if I had seen that thirty years ago? To a young student, that Archivo might seem the house where the wealth of the Americas is stored. I hear that thousands of bundles of documents are in it relating to early voyages of discovery and the establishment of the colonies, and that they have not been well rummaged. Ruefully I remembered that I have no time to spare for exploring such an *El Dorado*.

One could spend a long holiday in Seville's Archivo, that would be almost as good as a legitimate escape from the continuous uproar. No earnest propagandist loudly recruiting for the latest crusade, nor campaigners banging their drums for the assembly to this and the other, would be likely to know you had retreated to it, slipped clean away—though, maybe, only into a last ditch for the application of intelligence without heat to a likely subject. After the long years we have endured of potent convictions and



opinions bursting in distracting explosions round the horizon, as if hot brains were blowing up everywhere, scattering fiery notions to endanger all the thatches, the seclusion of that Seville library, concerned as it is with adventures on which silence has fallen, would be a fair substitute for peace. The great discoveries which changed the course of life's streams are but ghostly; the splendour of arms is to be found only under the rust; no infection now; no call to obey or worship; no more bloodshot eloquence in the Archivo than there is in dry leaves. The victories at last are only the echoes pity hears in the wilderness after the armies have gone.

The walls of Troy are inevitably romantic, when the vultures have no more work to do under them, and we may brood in quiet amid the consecrated rubble. And as to such promptings to action as the famous face that launched a thousand ships, there is time at last to weigh Thersites against the Heroes. . . . "O thou great thunder-darter of Olympus, forget that thou art Jove the king of gods, and, Mercury, lose all the serpentine craft of thy caduceus, if ye take not that little less than little wit they have; which short-armed ignorance itself knows is so abundant scarce it will not in circumvention deliver a fly from a spider, without drawing their massy irons and cutting the web."

If the ships of Spain and the valour of conquistadores did not adventure in vain, yet her flag now flies over none of the new lands on which it was planted. It began happily at San Salvador, but appears to have come to an ambiguous pass somewhere about Detroit. How curious it is, too, that not till the Spaniards had lost their dominion and their power did they begin to come into their own! They had to turn from Peru and Mexico, and at last from Cuba and the Philippines, and water the vine at home. They had to look for Spain. America has assumed the power they lost, and may know better than Spaniards what to do with it; or perhaps learn something better presently, at a last

conference more desperate than the others, should slumps still prove no more likely to balloon than lead ballast

It surprises you, even on a first visit, that that Philip, of whom most of us have heard more than of other Spanish kings, was so dour about the Netherlands, and America and its wealth, when the obvious gold was the dust of his own country. Perhaps, from his chapels, he was unable to observe that, while brooding in prayer over his abstract rights, and we know to what that always leads. What could Jove do for him? No more than for others who are so beguiled by their importance and their state that they fail to note their ship is settling under them. Yet though Philip's ship was settling notwithstanding the pride in its pennants, we find it possible to sympathise with the unhappy king in one particular, it is as hard as ever to-day in Spain to know what to think about America. So it always is, for that matter, about any great state, wherever you stand to consider it, which is jealous of its sovereignty, and has power to put its gas and gun factories on double shift at the call of honour. It is hard to know what to think about it, but the Archivo stands as a sign of finality. That cannot be argued away. The glory in there is now down to bundles of parchments which few people ever see.

There could not be a better place for glory, either, especially if it has been nicely indexed, and so the bother in running it down is lightened. The trouble is that it never gets into a library, dry, innocuous, and deodorised, ready for indexing, before it has complicated more problems than three generations of us can straighten. That our fate should be to sweat from morning to night on the ruins which the developments of our energetic fathers bequeathed to us would be called idiocy, only we prefer to think of it as an ordinance of God. That noble thought maintains our self-esteem.

Perhaps it was regret on turning finally from that library, compelled to let it go, to continue this journey so that I should be back in London in good time, which made the

show of the Alcazar seem unreal, a fantasy which would vanish if a rude northerner touched it. That Moorish palace, which all travellers visit, is the architectural feat of jewellers. They were compelled to infinite geometrical repetition because spacious saloons and courts take up more material than a lady's girdle. That maze of slender pillars, marble floors, fountains, horse-shoe arches, tiled walls, and ceilings with a niggling fret in crimson, blue, and gold, the home of Moorish and Christian kings for seven centuries, the place of important births and the usual murders, is but an alien vision without relevance, purporting heaven knows what, till its upper chambers are seen. Then a visitor is in a world he knows; here, upstairs, royalty resided even recently, when in Seville. How confiding and reproachful are the worn plush, the faded carpets, the ormolu, the birds which sing in a glass case when wound up, and the family portraits so dim and flat that they are more poignant than if by Velasquez or Goya; for you know you have seen people something like them, yet have no curiosity about their names! You expect to find their lot numbers stuck on the frames. Where is the auctioneer with his cigar? A Victorian chair with frayed brocade, turned with empty arms towards a royal fireplace which plainly used to smoke, but never will again, while visitors giggle at its design, can be more affecting than the *Patio de las Muñecas* of the ancient lower palace, and those ferruginous stains in its marble floor, to mark the spot where Peter the Cruel murdered his brother.

Luckily, the alley called *Sierpes* was active once more. Last week's encounter in it of the Communist and the Deputy had joined the old stories of the emirs, and of Don Pedro who locked his women, when they could not please him, in the *Torre del Oro*. A placard announcing the next bull fight was on a wall of our café. We had returned to the sun. Our waiter, without being asked, brought saucers of olives and prawns, and the bottle. No. He had never seen the Alcazar. He did not care. He had seen its picture postcards. He exhibited proudly to each of us the precious

label on the selected bottle before dosing our glasses, and then was taking it away "¡Hl! toda!" cried Robin, and took the bottle from him.

After all, an antiquary would have to admit that the vine is older in Spain than the Alcazar, and what is more, is still alive and tough. And that night, politely following some advice because there was nothing else to do, we went to see some Andalusian dancers. We found ourselves in an unpromising room. Perhaps a recollection of dances in London and Paris made us listless. But there was nothing else to do. We waited, while a Spaniard in a sort of Eton jacket, standing alone, absently twirled castanets, as though in a trance lightly defying an hallucination.

Then the girls came in. They billowed across the floor in flounced skirts of muslin, with light shawls of many colours, high combs and flowers in their black hair, and one was the handsomest of the group till the next moved across. They did not see us, however. They appeared to suppose they had the room to themselves. It struck me they would have been disdainful had they noticed an audience was watching them, but they were blithely unaware of it. They were languorous. They idly tried a few steps, and gave a flourish or two to their castanets. They whispered to each other. Something had amused them, but whatever it was they kept it to themselves.

The man in the short black jacket made a peremptory signal, and two of the girls showed signs of interest. They became alert and detached themselves. Music began. They faced each other. Their feet flickered in flourishes of silk, with free but tentative steps. Their waists were pivotal on wheeling flounces which whirled in reverse as they became statues, posing their arms, in invitation. Their companions, standing at the back, were gently chattering an undertone of castanets. Gradually that sound swelled in a menacing way, like a wind increasing, when the ship heels, and the spume flies. We rose. You could not sit and watch those girls.

We became aware of the grace and power of life when that group of Seville's young women surprised with their first movements from languor into a dance. They were not in haste. They had been perfecting those steps since before metals were known; and they still had plenty of time. And if only we could believe in anything with a touch of their joyous conviction when they quickened to the measure and we stood to watch! The drive and rhythm of their movements were sensational to a northerner, who is used to the slithering of jazz and acrobatics. He began to suspect that he was a barbarian, while watching young Seville. He had a faint recollection, though, of those figures, and those poses. Yet how could that be? Then he recognized it all. A group from an Egyptian or Cretan fresco circulated there. The girls were young, but they continued that life.

If all the conferences fail, and we come down to the condition of peasants persuading the earth to yield corn and oil, we shall still be able to keep the best that men have done, for economically it is valueless, though without it we should have no music and no levity.

#### THE CATHEDRAL

Our bus may have been right, necessity being what it is with speed to match it, in hurrying through Spain from cathedral to cathedral. It was doing its best within the limit allowed. It gave us cause to-day to see that if our journey had been straight from Victoria Station to Seville, to allow us ten minutes to stand beside the first shaft within the cathedral's principal door, that would have been reward enough.

Seville's haughty fabric is restorative. It is a testimony above challenge to the quality of the commonalty. It is sovereign but impersonal. It suggests no fine names. The tomb of Columbus is there, but it is as incidental as a cardinal's hat which hangs from the shadows like a big red spider on a thread. The hat is anonymous. Kings are

hidden there, but they have less to do with it now than the old man in medieval dress conducting a file of choristers across the vast floor like a black beetle with a line of tiny white moths fluttering after him. A priest in gold vestment is before the altar of a chapel, and kneeling behind him are a few women and one man. A beggar importunes. A group of tourists is whispering and staring about. Music is drifting somewhere from the heart of it. The varied life out of which the cathedral rose continues to circulate in it, the ascent of the masonry is still tense with the vigour which sent it aloft.

You cannot see to what hidden expansions the aisles lead, nor to what height the shafting lifts, but there is a sense of the universal in unity. You know men can do well. They did this. Their joy in their various crafts is in the soaring lines of the rock, the foliation of ironwork, the extravagance of the wood-carving. Generation after generation of them, in their conviction of a right and single purpose, brought about miraculously this show of intrinsic human values. The majesty of Seville's old sign of the integrity of the populace is above the edicts, bulls, prescriptions, enactments, impositions, and requisitions of kings, cabinets, popes, dictators, presidents, and what not. All that is reduced to litter.

One never did fully trust those notables, nor ever felt sure their commands were directed to welfare. But there is nothing strange about that, what is strange and important is that of late we have lost faith in the nobodies who did such work as this cathedral. That is another and more serious matter. To lose faith in our fellows is to empty earth of meaning. If it is without meaning, then it is absurd to maintain hope for civilisation, because there is no value in a social virtue which is inapplicable to society. The light goes out. What would a simple priest do if one day he knew his faithful candles lighted only a hollow?

And it is easy to-day to lose faith in the crowd, and to cease to expect resolute intelligence and intrepid fellowship

to come from that. The appearance of our docile neighbour in a dutiful gas-mask will do the trick, following that recent kindly official instruction, bearing the royal coat-of-arms, to cover our garden, and if possible the house-roof, in case of need, with a thick layer of soot and chloride of lime, against the fall of a ghastly dew from heaven, which blinds, and rots the lungs. It is as if you saw above your neighbour's collar, or in the portrait of a premier, not the face of a man, but a death's head. Common sense is horrified. Is this real? Then those eye-sockets mock human effort. We must find the courage to admit it. Brains have turned to blow-flies if, in the common routine of the home, we must see we get our anti-vesicant and chloride of lime with the bread and butter, and beside the infant's cot at night leave with our blessing and the doll the babe's little gas-mask. The Magi never thought of that gift. When life falls to imbecility it would be better to blot it out; let the desert come. Our present casual indifference to corruption lying at the very brink of the fount of life; our acceptance of diabolism as a natural stink and infection in the commune, no more avoidable than rain or Christmas Day, would show that mind has ceased its aspiration to light and loveliness, being foul.

Must we accept that? Is the generous spirit gone which shaped the cathedrals? Sometimes it seems so. The surrender of the multitude everywhere, disheartened and apathetic, to governance which announces its purpose to refine from knowledge and intelligence all surprises till there issues only a uniform and reliable drive for national machinery, and to throw mercy to the dogs, has made many of us wonder whether in future democracy will have more power to will its orientation than sheep have in the choice of a slaughter-house. And if there is to be always a likelihood that any night, and without notice, our bodies may be turned into slime, and the inventions and work of centuries into trash, because statesmen on appeal can see nothing better to do with them, then what is left but the fun to be anarchs, and to spend what good things we have in one jolly burst,

one last orgy, while the opportunity is not yet sloughed by chemicals, rather than wait to drop off as greenfly under an insecticide?

That is where we are to-day. Civilization is threatened this time, not by force from without, but from within, taint at the heart. To that dead end have the devices of Europe's leaders brought the people of a continent. Is there any testimony to justify our old trust in those men, as a cathedral stands for the value of the mob? There is. The craft and creative energy of statesmen for generations in organising victory is a mountain of war-debts so high that nobody knows where in the clouds it ends. They did that. So appalling a monument, quite shapeless, for it cannot be pictured, and so obstructive to the sun that things will not grow under it, is the testimony to their genius for building, though they promise that they are preparing the base for a still greater one, yet honestly admit, at present, that destruction next time may not afford them sufficient material before eternal night, in which there will be none either to admire or hang them, puts an end to their enterprise.

That means we could throw hope to the beasts, as our leaders have thrown mercy, but for one thing. It is not democracy which has failed, it is the statesmen. Their Promised Land may prove to be Desolation any week, but they know of no way out, they propose instead that we should accustom ourselves, as suitable wolves. Democracy, however, has never yet been tried, it has been only fooled. Luckily, we know that the good nature of ordinary folk, who are the majority, readily responds to the simple and magnanimous appeal, if it come. They are the last to be corrupted. The common man, nearly always, is a kindly and helpful fellow. The power of a government is never complete without his corruption or subjection, for power has no continuance but in the credulity and obedience of the simple.

If simple men cannot save us then we are lost. What they could do with a revivifying idea. Seville's great fabric is the sign. It is, in its bulk, the work of nameless men.



Even its architects are unknown. It is a testimony to the fellow who had a good thought to make manifest with his hands while living on bread and onions. There was an army of him, for a century and more, labouring at this. They must have had their conflicting interests, but the task reconciled them. They could not expect to see the sun upon their completed work, nor hear applause for its success. Some quarried the rock, others set the masonry, or carved timber, or made the glass, or hammered tendrils and leaves for the bronze and iron gates. They were all in it, foresters, artists, quarrymen, blacksmiths, builders, hewers of wood and drawers of water. They believed in something and meant to give it form. There it is now, and there is no more to be said about it than there is of great music. Harmonious and triumphant, it attests to the power of a transfiguring conviction, and not of war, but of peace.

Out of the cathedral again, the sudden heat and glare and the street uproar came as a shock, and we were hardly ready for it. The cathedral rises directly from Seville's labyrinth. It is the outcome of the press and medley, and naturally towers richly various out of that sparkling heat and vivacity.

The walls were torrid, and one had to breathe their radiation. Then, as if Seville had not done enough for us in our chance visit, and was still doubtful that we knew her full measure, she sent rushing after us a squall of hot wind. The blinds and awnings banged and shook as if the city had luffed round. Seville was going about. The flags spiralled upward, not knowing which way to fly, lashings carried away, the women scudded, a flock of hats spun and looped in mid-air, and a fog of dust with old papers fixed in it swept express down the street and dispersed above the roofs. It blew out as we found shelter. Hats were dead in the road, and could be picked up. Then the sky became ominous in copper and ink. Torrents crashed, and the baked pavements were lost in steam.

At sunset, after its bath, the city was moist and cool. In the Alcazar gardens there was a strong smell of earth.

While trying that smell again, you hardly knew whether to fear it or relish it. It was as fresh as the evening rain, but as old as time. The leaves and flowers were motionless. Palm fronds seemed cast in metal. There were secretive sounds, perhaps the last of the droning falling from the boughs into the shadows, and you fancied a stirring, as if something were breathing deeply. But there was no movement, when you spied curiously through the foliage into the murk which was hiding the lower trunks, because only dun little globes were conspicuous within, which were fallen oranges and they were quite still, though somehow that looked like their cunning.

#### SUMMARY

A brief pause was made in our journey next day, though we did not alight. We were given the chance to sit quietly in the bus and reflect on the Guadalete.

Though what was that? We waited solemnly trying to feel the influence of whatever was latent in a stretch of barren ground, some chickens, a water-course, and a group of suburban houses and shops standing near. On inquiry, I found my companions, though grave, were slightly puzzled. They were inspecting the scene with vague eyes. A young woman stood there, describing to a young man, and with every sign of conviction, some matter important to him, and there could be no doubt it was his character. We could not hear a word of her discourse, but his unresisting dejection was enough. Had we stopped to witness that?

It appeared we had not. The Guadalete is a small river which flows into the Bay of Cádiz, now not far off, though unseen. Near that river one of the many battles of the world was fought which are popularly known as decisive.

Well, and then? The Somme, that is another river, and its name has profound reflections, yet who stops to look at a stretch of its reeds and placidity to reflect on what

happened near it, once upon a time? Not many of us, now. And the Guadalete is sunk still further in the past, the decision there came more than a thousand years before that by the Somme; as far off as the year 711 of our era. A Berber warrior named Tarik—Gibraltar is named after him, for he landed from Africa thereabouts—led a body of raiders against an army of Goths, and that was the beginning of the Saracen dominion of Spain, which lasted for nearly five hundred years. The Saracen army was not led by an Arab. The enterprise was begun, and in the main was continued, by toughs of a race which was in North Africa when the Pyramids were built, and before that. It is possible these Berbers were of the same stock as our own New Stone Age folk; but the Arabs were their masters, and Mohammed, when they happened to remember him, was their Prophet. After the Gothic army was dispersed by the Guadalete the Moors went through Spain at their ease.

Robin chuckled. There was no need to hear what that young woman was saying to her man. Her pose was stylish, her governance absolute, and her eloquent gestures would have driven him to cut and run, only he knew he would have to come back, so he stood and took it, with bowed head and limp hands. Tarik had not so easy a victory. A rooster and his wives were scattered near this engaged couple. The hens scratched and picked indifferently, but their sultan stood erect, cocking an eye in astonishment at the woman. The bus watched in wicked joy while the pretensions of the man, one after another, were stript from him. She did it all with her hands and chin. He could not move. Felix muttered that so good a music-hall turn, and not a word said, would bring down the house in London. A policeman stood below us, cynically watching the performance. He called out to the woman, politely drawing her attention to a larger and happier audience. She wheeled in surprise, generously welcomed our notice, and continued her fun. Felix then wondered whether the decisive battle of the Gaudalete may not have sprung from an irrelevant

harem interlude of that sort, continued to desperation, though history does not record it

Soon we were in Jerez, and the appearance of that town, which is the origin of a word pleasant to multitudes who will never see the place from which sherry comes, was what we had hoped for. It was right. The sun was unconditional there, but the colour-washed houses within their shrubberies rose to it lightly. We were taken directly to a *boxega*, as pilgrims go at once to a shrine. We spent hours, though they were not empty, strolling from one cave to another, nor did the sun get much hotter, though the last invitation of all which was not expected, needed faith and resolution to face it because night would surely come. Yet Jerez de la Frontera has more than good wine. For one thing, it has a cooperage which recalled a shed of the old Rum Quay, of the West India dock though it would have spoiled the wine to have counted up the years backward to that shed. This Spanish cooperage could have been a London scene of the past. The tools careless amid the litter, the suggestion that the accuracy of a barrel is fortuitous, were familiar, and so was the smell of the fresh shavings of oak. I rather fancy that smell was as rich as the bouquet of the sherry. And the gait of a man briskly stepping round a cask and tapping as he danced, that was familiar, too. He was as right as an old vintage. You must have the measuring eye, which I now as well as sees to build out of many staves a butt of one hundred and twenty gallons to within a quart of its capacity, and so that it shall keep its precious contents. Near to that cooperage, however, was colour which put us far south of the Thames. Several trees, *Paulonia imperialis*, as tall and light as birches, were clouds of soft blue against white walls, though where the trees topped the walls they almost dissolved into the hot sky.

They are affable with the English, in this Spanish town. The best they have is given. They know enough about us to quote Shakespeare, who could, of course, distinguish between one wine and another. Sir John Falstaff preferred

the pride of this place to Canary. "A good sherris-sack hath a two-fold operation in it: it ascends me into the braine: the second property of your excellent sherris is, the warming of the blood." The fact is, though, that the sherry which reaches England is more powerful stuff than you are given at its origin, and that is just as well, down south; even lusty Sir John would have died earlier in the south of Spain, perhaps before he could tell us what he thought of Honour on the field of battle, on his accustomed sherris-sack.

The great wine-houses are not "caves." They stand above ground taller than most churches, and with aisles as cool, though more lofty and spacious. Their appropriate candelabra are elaborately designed of many bottles. We were shown casks of venerable stuff dedicated to famous men, to Nelson, Wellington, Fox and Pitt. One cask is given to literature. It is inscribed to Ruskin, whose father was agent in London for the firm.

While sitting in one cool recess we were glad to be assured that whatever might happen in London or New York, following our earnest efforts at an economic recovery, that Jerez would continue steadily to replenish its butts and casks. Perhaps the barrels may prove to be as sure a foundation for human happiness as an order in Privy Council or the rock of Manhattan. In the hospitable bodegas of Jerez it is quite easy to induce a flush of confidence to steal over you though you do not forget Birmingham and Chicago; for when another rare vintage is handed round you are able to see with your own eyes the veritable sunlight of the Hungry Forties. After all one has read of that ugly period, this evidence mocks at wisdom and learning. Was this the warmth and brightness of a hungry time? Was the sun so good? Then its virtue must have been almost entirely missed by the people to whom it was given. They could not have known what to do with it. Its expressed virtue, surviving in a glass at Jerez, shines still with the original benefit of its glow. Strange, that the full and right use of a quality

of daylight so rich was not well understood, instead, that people then were on short commons!

Would not the sun do for men what it did for grapes? Only by such rare and unsought glimpses do we get our valuable lessons from history. Why were the Forties hungry? If men were then as careless and improvident with the sunlight as they are to-day, hadn't they enough sense to put their trust in doles and relief centres instead? But progress is always slow

#### CADIZ

We had come to the southern edge of Spain. There was the Gulf of Cadiz, the sea that goes on to the Americas. Continuance in that direction, however, was not promised. We could go no further. Nor was there even a desire to take ship. That serene affinity with the sky to westward told us that it went further than the next continent, that it continued years without end. No ship could last it out. Time is an idle word, when you look west from the bulwarks of Cadiz. You are already at sea, in Cadiz. You lean your elbows on the rail of a white city afloat in the blue, launched well out into space from the land. Its gulf is one with the stuff of dreams. Stand long enough at an outer rampart of this city, a crumbling tawny wall which at its extremity turns the sea above it to purple, and you forget the solid earth is behind you. It is lucky there is a schooner suspended far out, the sight holds fast to that.

That schooner, translated and fixed, keeps the eyes afloat. The mind would swim without her, with nothing above it, and nothing below, except the colour of infinity. There has been no change or progress out there, or else it made no more difference than the shadow of a cloud. Except by turning round there is no telling that the Phoenicians are not about. For Cadiz carries a company of ghosts, some of them made the earlier visits to the Cassiterides. The Romans followed them. It is better not to look round. The

silver fleet from Puerto Bello has not arrived yet, so let us watch for its topsails. It anchors at Cadiz.

A puzzling city. What with its old renown, its ghosts and reminders, and the waters so much about it that the points of the compass went wrong at the first corner we rounded—as though our ship had turned with the tide while I was inattentive—I began to wish that I could guess what it was all about, though hoping the bright vision would last. If Cadiz were anchored in this year, there was a lurking suspicion that she might slip her cable, and fetch to in circumstances that were without known bearings, or bearings forgotten.

It was noticeable that the sense of the past, and yet that original dazzle of blue and white of a city only just beginning on a promising southern isthmus, affected our little company. They did not know what to say about it. History was fused in this fervour. History was, as it were, only a matrix of glorious malachite. Moreover, we knew we must be neighbours to Africa; we felt its influence in the glare of the place. The light was lively, though, and raised expectancy. There was only a wonder over what the outlook would be at the next corner, and the outlook was always new.

Felix paused in the shade by a promising door, which had no bush because it didn't need it, and wiped his brow. He was warned that promising doors of seaports which get plenty of generative sun are better passed in one's stride; their magic can be dubious. He said he was immune from magic. He said the sun was now over the fore-yard. This *taberna* was all right.

So it was; no magic whatever. A few men, who were seafarers, were only wasting time in it. And another, an elderly man sitting by himself at the table next to us, gave us a hard look, and then a nod. He might have been the respectable master of a Spanish ship, but to Robin's great interest and surprise it was noticed that spread before him on his table was a famous Manchester newspaper.

We learned he was the proprietor of the tavern. It

would be impossible to keep Robin from affable converse sideways with any stranger who betrayed proper knowledge of Manchester. One of us lightly mentioned our colleague's bond with that paper. The man rose, he stared, then welcomed Robin as a royal personage, and gave us all his happy attention. He spoke English with ease. Lancashire, we began to understand, must be a highly influential county, for it is thought by some foreigners to be England itself, we outlanders of England were jealous to see that Robin was treated as though he were our rightful lord.

What about London? Yes, yes, London! It is very large, is it not? Mr Pablo had heard it is very large.

He gossiped quietly of the revolution. You could see it gave him pleasure to have a journalist listening to him. That revolution was nothing. It was not bloody. It was only like an orange, which falls when it is very ripe. No trouble at all. The people of Cadiz, sir, are always reformers. They had been waiting for it how long? And then the day came. Then they went into the streets. People must go into the streets when there is a revolution, a fiesta. Certainly there was a little burning, but the people were polite. He himself saw that. There was no cruelty. He himself watched, and the reformers went into a church, and came out holding pictures and other things which are in churches, in their arms, to burn them. But they were not angry. There were many people in the square, and a man who was carrying a picture of the Holy Family to burn pushed it into Mr Pablo, but he was not rude. He said, "Excuse me. I am truly sorry to crush you."

While he told us of revolution, I had in front of me the window of the veranda, which was a rectangle of intense blue. It had a spray of scarlet geranium suspended from its outer lintel. Beyond that flower was the white stalk of a distant lighthouse, and behind that slowly passed, apparently through the air, a felucca. We continued to hear of the burning of the pictures and the vestments. Beneath that window sat a red-headed man, who had his bulky shoulders



turned to us. He was alone. Once while Mr. Pablo was talking he slewed round slyly to inspect us. His clean-shaven face and petulant underlip were not Spanish. His face was ruddy and strongly featured, and a little freckled. He gave us his back again, and resumed rubbing indolently the belly of a tabby cat, which was spread luxuriously on the marble table-top before him.

There came a call for Mr. Pablo. He had business to which he must go—very sorry. It was a great pleasure, this meeting. He would never forget it. Would we come again? This house, it was ours. We could have anything. He gave a peremptory order about us to a sallow youth in a linen jacket. Then out he went, bowing. Robin rounded on us in merry triumph, spreading his hands. "There you are," he complained, "I have to bring you fellows all the way down to a pub in Cadiz before you'll see how the world respects me. Mr. Pablo reads me regularly, and you don't."

He continued to lark gravely with this grievance while the man under the window lumbered out of his chair hugely, and came and stood behind our companion, as if he wished to speak to us before going out, but did not care to interrupt Robin's fun. He had his cap in his hands, but he stood as one well able to take care of himself. He waited, looking down in patient deference from a good height at unconscious Robin, yet as a man never worried now by the voice of authority. I could see no need for him to be put out by it, either, when supported by what those wary and steady blue eyes would take in at a glance. I suspected he had looked into dirt ahead from the steering wheel often enough, but had never felt anything so badly that his expression had changed.

Robin glanced sideways nervously, and saw the shadow of him. "Eh? Hullol! What's this? I can see you'll be one of us." We made room. "Sit down. Off a British ship?"

"Off more than one." The chair was frail under that hard bulk.

"So I'd say; but only one at a time?"

"That's right Left in hospital, that's all Had an upset with a winch I'm waiting for the next ship of ours to pick me up "

"We were talking of Manchester, you'll know that great city?"

"Ah It's got a canal "

Felix and Fabian laughed "Last time I was in it," said our friend, 'we were hung up in a lock, and the old man had time to buy up and cut an allotment of red cabbages alongside, and pickled the rotten stuff for the store I don't forget Manchester "

"How do you like Cadiz?"

"Me? Well, I'm here You just have to wait where you are till you can get away Where you are is all right " He cooled a hand on the table It glittered with little brass threads, and the image of a woman in red and blue was tattooed on the back of it I should guess it could splinter a door, and then show no marks

"I heard you speaking English to the padron here," said the stranger "He's a nice old dad So I wanted to hear some of the same stuff Besides, don't you write newspapers?"

He seemed nervous, because this perhaps was what no man should ask another, but he was also somewhat minatory He was speaking, of course, to Robin, who motioned a hand airily to us to answer for him, too shy to speak for himself We explained that our friend wrote some of one newspaper

"Ah One's enough. Two's bad, and three is hell "

We glanced at each other with guilty smiles Robin applauded, and thumped on the table He turned in glee and called to the boy in a white jacket This sentiment must be toasted Robin clinked glasses with the sailor "To hell with the other newspapers!"

"Hear, hear, nuster That's what I say, but all of them, says I Excuse me, gentlemen, I expect you know a place called Fleet Street, you've been in it?"

You could have heard us breathing, in the silence The

stranger glanced in child-like faith at each of us, a little surprised by our difficulty in admitting so simple a fact. His jutting chin and tight lips advised us that we had better be conditional in any reply we made. Yet why? I fancy he assumed that he had gone too far. "No offence meant. I thought perhaps you knew the street. It's near Charing Cross."

"Well, do you know it?" asked Robin.

"Ah. Do I know it!"

"But I thought you were a sailor. You were never in a newspaper office?"

"Me, mister?" He actually flushed, and paused, and gave Robin a direct overhaul. After reflection he said, "I know what you mean, mister. You meant no harm. All the same, I was in several of 'em, one Sunday afternoon. Yes, I was that. It was during the war. Me and a mess-mate were both there. We were on leave while the *Serpent* was in dry-dock. She was a destroyer. She wanted tinkering-up. She'd been through it."

"Action?"

"What else? You wouldn't have asked, if you'd seen her. It was after the sinking of the *Potsdam*."

"What about telling us that first?"

"That! Nothing in that. We were there, that's all. I don't remember much about it. I was at the wheel. Orders is enough to attend to. We stood in towards Fritz, trying it on, often enough, and turned about again. He spotted us. We got off only one torpedo that I know of, but I remember wondering how long our old opened can would keep afloat. She'd been swept. Yes, and another thing. I wished they'd shift one of our chaps out of her bows, because he stood up there, and he took my eyes from the straight. He had no head."

"The *Potsdam* was heeling to port, making a noise like an iron-foundry falling down. She was getting on her beam ends, pouring with smoke, but her flag was flying. Our cruisers ceased fire on her. We went in to let her have

a tin-fish to finish it, as she wouldn't give in. Her men were sliding down her starboard side, rolling down it, like spilled beans on a slope. Her bilge keel caught most of them. It was full of them. Some were standing on it, too, watching us as we closed her. Our fellers sang out to them to jump for it, we'd pick 'em up, but those Germans were sailors. Yes, they were. They made dirty noises at us, ah, and did other things. Our men cheered them. What's that? No, we didn't let fly at her. She was finished. It's silly to waste a good torpedo on the dead.

'After we made port, I got leave, and came up to London with Bill Grummet. It was a Sunday. First we went to my old dad at Deptford, and then we went to see Bill's brother, a chap who worked in Fleet Street. I don't know what he did there. Don't care, either. We found him in a place called the Blue Griffin, and had a few. We told him about the show the *Serpent* had been in, and Bill fished out of his pocket a roll of films. He had a little camera on the *Serpent*, like the silly fool he was. It seems he'd pulled the trigger on the German as she was foundering.

'Wait here, you chaps,' says Bill's brother, very excited, grabbing the roll. 'Don't go away. I'll get this fixed. We'll see what is on it. Stay here till I come back.'

"So we waited. I noticed several fellows in that pub were watching us, and presently they came over, very nice. Very nice. They wanted to know how it was at sea! I wished they'd had some of that bilge keel. I'd have liked to have perched 'em on it. Sit there, laddies! How's that for the life of a sailor!

"When Bill's brother came back he looked more important than any man ought to look. A swell from his office came with him. Were they nice to Bill? Mister, we could have drained that pub dry. Says the swell to Bill, 'I'll give you ten pounds for this film.' He held it up. There the picture was, plain enough.

"But Bill only grinned. He didn't want to sell it. 'You and your ten pounds!' says Bill. 'I tell you what,' said

Bill; 'I'll let it go for a diamond breast pin and a rocking horse.' He thought they were pulling his leg. Would any photograph be worth all that money? Would it?

"I could see that swell was beginning to get bothered. I suppose he saw the other fellows in the pub watching us, and he knew who they were. 'Look here, Mr. Grummet,' he says, 'I'll make it twenty quid.'"

"Then Bill laughed. He looked at me, and laughed louder. 'Hear that?' Bill said, 'You hear what he thinks of us? Now look here, young feller,' he says, turning to the swell, 'I suppose you reckon because we're sailors we're so glad to be let out of the dogs' home we'll wag our tails at anything?'"

"That swell's bearings got hotter. He wiped his forehead. He was worried. He thought Bill was fly. 'All right, Mr. Grummet,' he whispered, coming close, 'hang on here I shan't be long. I'll run round to see what our office will do for you. You stick to that picture. Hold on to it. It's valuable. Don't show it to anybody. I'll be back in five minutes—less than that.'"

"When he had gone, two of the other young sparks came over. 'We couldn't help hearing something about this, so we'll make no bones of it, Mr. Grummet,' says one of them at once. 'Straight off, we'll get you a hundred pounds for that photograph.'"

"Bill got up slowly, and pulled his jumper straight. He had a dirty expression. 'Mind your eye,' Bill says, 'or I'll black it. I don't know who you are, and I don't want none of your funniosities. Keep your jib clear. If you don't shift it, I'll foul your cable.'"

"They wouldn't go, though. I was fed up with all this. Bill got dazed. Something had happened, and he didn't know what. There he was, staring at me, with his mouth open, as if he wanted to hail, but didn't know what signal to make. No more did I. First to this newspaper office we went, and then to another, walking fast from one to the next. Everybody talked to us as if we were comrades

"The price rose I don't know where it went to It went out of sight Bill saw that he was caught in the shoals on a falling tide, and he'd lost his bearings and couldn't find a clear course He steered wild But those blood-suckers only thought he was getting more and more artful, and kept close under his stern to board him whichever way he went All he wanted was the fairway, but it was no go He tried to believe them, but he couldn't do that, either 'Don't let these sharks get me,' he said, catching my arm

"At last it was settled, in one place, I've forgotten which It doesn't matter That newspaper, whichever it was, got it Bill was too knock-kneed and weak by then to run clear Hundreds of pounds! Then those newspaper ducks said that they couldn't make up all the money Because it was Sunday, they said The banks were closed

'Out with it, orders Bill, 'and quick's the word'

"Well, says they, would Mr Grummet take a hundred pounds on account, and leave the rest till Monday?

"Would he! He never had believed them, so when he saw the notes, when they handed him the notes and notes and notes and notes and notes, ten-pounders and fivers, oners and shovelfuls of small stuff and silver spillings they'd swept off the decks to make it up, poor Bill was no better than blotto He went dizzy He was like a child with a barrel of treacle and the bung out He wasn't worrying about Monday He took what they had while it was there He stuffed it into his pockets and his shirt and his cap and his socks and his earholes, and loaded me up with it, too, tons of silver dunnage till I took a list, and had to re-stow it Then we were cut adrift

"I had to leave Bill, and go home, but I gave him sailing orders Look at me, Bill! Look! No swing doors, Bill! Nothing of that Keep clear of all glad eyes Don't see them But Bill, he only smiled like a baby when you pinch his chin

"On Tuesday I stepped aboard the ship again, good and proper, bright and early, but Bill didn't No Bill What's more, that photograph had appeared in the papers, and as

big as an ensign, too. You couldn't miss it. It was flying everywhere. Everybody was looking at it. It was a great and glorious victory.

"I was asked about it, but what did I know, mister? What could I know? A nasty wind was getting up. Somebody had barged across the holy regulations, and there was going to be the devil and all to pay.

"When Bill did turn up a day late he was for it, though he didn't know it. He was pinched at the foot of the gang-plank. It was war-time, and you mustn't be late for war, or you'll be shot. Bill, innocent like, explained how it happened. Would a man like him desert, with his service? And Bill supposed, poor silly fool, that as the officers all had cameras, the order against them was only dandy scroll-work. He found out his mistake. The law fell on Bill's head like a block from aloft.

"Five years, he got. Five, mister. A sailor like that, too, and a gunner with an eye that could hit a mark you couldn't see! Put away! That was the end of glory for Bill. He was a good mate and a seaman. I wish I knew what happened to him afterwards."

The cat jumped on the sailor's knees, and rubbed its head against his waistcoat. He tickled it behind the ears thoughtfully. He turned his head, and stared out into the blue which was the Bay of Cadiz. We all stared that way.

"That's the place," said Robin quietly, after a bit, "where Drake singed the King of Spain's beard."

"Did how?" asked the sailor.

"Drake sailed in here, and burned the Spanish fleet," explained Robin.

"Ah," said the sailor.

#### MALAGA

The coast from Cape St. Vincent eastward to Cape Palos is familiar to most voyagers, but only as loomings. It is rarely more than an apparition abeam, perhaps the

precipitation from sunsets, which dissolves when the ship stands away to another point. It is hard to believe that even a fisherman, except one of the kind you meet in an Arabian Night, ever attempts to make that shore. It is seldom so close that the surf is seen moving along the base of reality. If ever the white breakers are almost on the verge of distinction, something really alive, then the land looks still more forlorn, as though it had been forgotten since soon after voyaging began, and was only a legend. When you are under Gibraltar the coast is veritable, but who wants to land there?

Long ago, I've forgotten how long, a cruiser was on manœuvres, and anchored a mile offshore, long after sundown, a little to the eastward of Cape St Vincent, and there that night we coaled from a collier that met us. It was my farthest south, then, so I am not likely to forget it. If there were any lights ashore, or if there was a shore, all was put out by the flares on our decks and in the holds of the collier, which were full of noise, bright beams, and demons. The shore was one with the night, and the night was hardly blacker than the mob in the ward-room at supper, for it looked like a troupe of nigger-minstrels, but was twice as uproarious. I am not likely to forget it, as that cruiser's captain went down later at Jutland with all his men.

On deck next morning, so near St Vincent, it was surprising to see that what had been only a constant and uniform tawny cloud in the north, while we were cruising, now had a rugged resemblance to the earth. There were houses painted in unusual colours on a buff hillside, and this flat scene mimicked rocks and shadows and overflowings of foliage, and boats more florid than I knew them to be were hauled up on a beach, though of course there were no men. It was Lagos, Portugal. But I did not land, so could prove nothing. That was my nearest to that coast, except Gibraltar, and the glimmer of the Sierra Nevada after we had passed the Pillars on another voyage.

East by road out of Cadiz was another way of seeing it



Our wheels, though, were too fast to give us much more than wonder over the strange fact that this coast has not had the noticeable tributes which have been given to the French Riviera, and the Italian shores. Well, we know the Italian journey is traditional with the English. It is a beaten track, and could be made now by somnambulists, and often is.

We sat submitting in docility to the flight past us of miles of marine marshes, lagoons with white mounds of salt beside them everywhere, a strange half-drowned plain reticulated with sere rushes, and exposed to the sun. It invited exploration, had there been time for it. It had to go. We were submissive, too, for some while, after we reached hilly country; but when the bus began to skirt the sea, when we saw across waters that had the colours of a dove's throat the mountains of Africa, we put a stop to our lunatic revolutions. These drivers of motors want nothing but road pouring under them till they come to the end of it. Any road will do for them. It is the latest form of fixture in unreason. At last we got our fellow to understand that his speed was less to us than what we were missing.

There were herds of cattle, belly-deep, too, in herbage, instead of goats among rocks; and forests of oak, the cork oak. The steep slopes down to the beaches were quivering with the heads of flowers lively in the wind, scabious, yellow marguerite, blue centaury, a scarlet clover, and charlock. Tangier, across the straits, was a little white threshold to Morocco, and the sea was a mosaic of amethyst, olivine, and sapphire. The beaches below us were as though waiting for things to begin, but the pioneers from Tyre and Sidon had already crawled by them on the first voyage to the north; and Cape Trafalgar was in sight. The passing of the *Santa Maria*, the *Pinta* and the *Nina*, had been watched from the heights where we stood, going nobody knew where; and down below us Tarik and his Moors had landed. We saw to it, in fact, that our bus took longer on the journey to Algeciras than unreason had determined. Gibraltar itself, from the gardens of Algeciras, was so noble across

the bay that we surrendered the Rock to whoever wanted to visit it. We cut it out of our journey. It would have been a pity to have chanced spoiling our admiration for it with a visit. We agreed in those gardens, that it would show a trilling and uncertain mind, it would betray clap-traps proper dupes, to spend time hunting for another Mediterranean shore which could outshine that of southern Spain.

It is a memorable road that from Cadiz to Malaga. The hills grew to mountains. There were dry ravines with a chaos of boulders as huge as barns to show the power of floods. Among the crops was sugar-cane, and that is not happy without richness of soil and climate. Nor would it be easy to do justice to Malaga itself. It is simpler to say that the thought of it will keep with that of its namesake, Malacca of Celebes though the last has a serious disadvantage, for it is a haven too distant to allow most of us to enter it more than once in a lifetime.

A native of Malaga strolled with us out along the eastern mole of the harbour to the lighthouse. We walked along the top of a wall out to sea. The city gradually extended behind us round its bay as we advanced and the mountains came up higher behind it. It was evening, and the wind fell. The city was in shadow, but there was light on the hills. The Mediterranean was burnished, and reflected or heightened any colour that was there. Fishing boats were coming home, were drifting indolently, and the voices of their men were distinct at a mile. Our Spanish friend took us out there because it is a favourite walk of his at sunset, and he is proud of it. We should, he promised, have some sardines roasted on the beach in the morning. It is a local speciality. The fishermen make fires and toast the fish on spits, if you care for it. Good stuff, he told us it is, with a local tipple.

The mention of fires reminded him of their revolution. He laughed sitting on a bollard watching the boats drift in while the light went, and told us more about that recent upset.

Spaniards, I suspect, are a patient, tolerant, and good-humoured people, though I do not pretend to know them. Spain does not suggest a revolution which would completely change it. We could not find that her recent change had more in it than the shrewdness of Sancho. She gave her king a chance to make a journey, and he took it at once. In Malaga, it appears, the citizens burned twenty-six churches, which was something of a record; but when the flames were most exciting, and even the bishop's palace was blazing—the bishop was not popular—the communists brought gasoline for the cathedral, next door. Then, however, the other rebels saw that this was more gasoline than they cared for. They refused it. They repulsed the extremists, crying as they fought at the west front of the building: "We atheists and republicans are saving the cathedral. Where are the Catholics?"

"Where were they?" one of us asked.

"I don't know about the Catholics," said our friend, "but the fire brigade came three days afterwards. No man can handle gasoline tins and a hose-pipe at the same time."

It began to look to us as if the thought of a Spanish mob, when it wants excitement, turns to the most conspicuous object in its landscape, the church, as naturally as does the thought of England to Epsom Downs on Derby Day. Our friend in Malaga explained that in a neighbouring village, where he has a house, the workmen came to him on the morning that they learned their king had fled. They wanted advice. They wished to burn the church. What about it?

"But," I said to them, "why burn it? It is yours. Do not burn what is yours."

This advice depressed his visitors. They regretted to hear it, but they listened patiently. They knew their counsellor must be a true man, for he was both a republican and a Protestant, yet would spare the old church.

They argued with him quietly. Is not this a revolution? Very well, José, then we ought to do something. What shall we do? Shall we burn the priest's house?

José saw they must celebrate by disposing of some sign or other of an ancient grievance, just for luck, and better the house of that priest than the old church. Anyhow, nobody in the village cared whether he had a house there or not.

‘Very good. Be kind to your father. Burn his house, but tell him what you are going to do before you do it. Give him time.’

They thanked José, and departed on their little mission. They seem to have betrayed no more feeling over it than villagers show about reparations to their well, which has been in a disgraceful state too long.

I think it possible a traveller in Spain, unless he asked, might never hear a word of a revolution which nevertheless changed an order of things so long established that the rest of Europe was bewildered. We had forgotten to give Spain the right attention. We had supposed she ended when defeated by America. She was left to enjoy herself as well as she could with the Church and the Monarchy, that inseparable pair, assumed by us to be as invulnerable as the bull-ring, but it is possible that Spain may yet prove to be the most fortunate country of Europe. Outside the large cities, and nearly all Spain is outside them, the land suggests that nothing has happened to it, despite Arabs, Napoleon, the fanaticism of dynasts, and Christians of a faith so burning that their pious deeds turned hell into a place of rest for their victims, except corn, olives, and vines, and it promises that it can so continue in perpetuity.

#### CLOUDLAND

The road from the coast inland to Loja and Granada mounts so quickly that Malaga, soon after you speed out of it, sinks to an incidental whitish spot, the indistinct reminder of a name you have learned. With so much insistence of eternal sea before it you begin already to question whether that is the place you have just left.

A sensation comes, now and then, when looking down from a mere bus, of a flight by aeroplane; our homely planet is sundered, and its markings have become mysterious. Moreover, as the day wears, the air grows cold at that altitude. Nothing is above but the sky, for even the clouds are below; yet occasionally over you are rounded crags and bosses of pale limestone afloat in evening isolation in the heavens, and they have the abandoned appearance of a lunar landscape.

After passing through the narrow streets of Loja with its cheerful lamps, for night had almost come, we lumbered down into a plain, which night had already filled. Nothing was to be seen ahead but a distant and faded remnant of day, a spectral relic of what had gone caught on unseen clouds. That pallid outline athwart the sky was strangely persistent, and for some time we watched it before we understood that we had seen it before. There it was again, the reflection of the last of day from the high snows of the Sierras above the Alhambra.

We were told at last we were in Granada. The bus was bumping over a tram junction. The glimpses we had of this city were so usual that a tired traveller could have supposed he was home again. Men were standing under street lights scanning newspapers, and young people were crowding into picture-palaces. There were peeps at walls adorned with the poster faces of Hollywood that are familiar in Granada and Macclesfield. Then we began to climb again, though slowly, for an obstinate tram kept in front of us. We were, in fact, ascending the mount of the Alhambra, behind a tram, which was forced to hinder us, as we could observe, because the track is both steep and narrow.

The Alhambra that night was merely a hotel in which no doubt an Arab prince on a pilgrimage to the capital of his fathers, or a tourist from Budapest, could have supposed that, though not in his native country, yet its idiosyncrasies were well understood. For our part, it was the same as an important British hotel, one in the habit of making the

correct adjustments to the Stars and Stripes. The head-waiter evidently knew us, and though he said nothing about it we saw we were free to assume that it would be a happy relief for him to attend to the right people.

This hotel had a balcony, where we sat after supper, a capacious shelf over an abyss of a depth unknown. We felt that we were translated to mid-air, but that it was easy to keep our height. There was a stillness and peace which allowed the continuous vivid glints of a rapid day to fade and disperse. Here we four had coincided in Granada, most curiously and very happily, the impossible had happened, so we could find nothing to say about it. We had leisure to note that we lived, and to relish the moment. The wheels had stopped. It was cool up there, after the torrid coast, yet still faintly scented by essences which belong to an ardent climate.

At a neighbouring table a silent young couple were covertly squeezing hands among coffee-cups and liqueur glasses. On the other side of us a conversation was going on about doings in Minneapolis. 'You've said it. Sure it's no good. Jarn talks that way. He says it would give me new life to go in with him. But his plant looks to me as unlucky as a shaker with holes in it. I wouldn't pour good gin into that, no sir.'

We were, we could see, when we looked down from our shelf, high above Granada, and supernally could survey it, though at that late hour it was no more than stars far down in the wrong direction, the diminished crowing of cocks, and the crooning of doves.

#### THE ALHAMBRA

Mol<sup>o</sup>granada, long before I saw it as a distant reflection at out of when eastward bound, had been a name to draw reminder<sup>on</sup>, as did a few others, Para, the Moluccas, insistence. 'What's in a name?' Nonsense probably. There question whe<sup>r</sup> instance. But if we think Mesopotamia a

blessed word, then it is. Does such a satisfaction really differ from the certainty that it is good to collect books about Napoleon or political economy, or to cultivate sweet-peas, or to continue to vote for the dear old party in irrevocable piety? If we think our dream adds a touch of beauty to a distressing world, that it lets into chaos an inkling of purpose, then let it do its best. It is a token of life's fruition; and that is a matter of great importance, even if we are shy of discussing it because, unluckily, no argument ever yet has given it the desired support.

We were out soon after sunrise, and found even before we reached the Alhambra that if we wished to be photographed in oriental costumes, leaning negligently under a Moorish arch, the scale of charges was reasonable. As the hour was early, the shop was shut. So was the Alhambra. We were not disappointed to learn that the keys had not arrived. We read the instructions posted up about fees, and saw that if we felt like wandering in the courts and palaces by moonlight then the ticket of admission would cost twice as many pesetas. Already we knew a bit about the Alhambra unknown to Boabdil or even to Washington Irving.

On a first walk abroad the great trees of a park just under the Alhambra are deceptive with the signs of the lowlands. They meet overhead and crowd close around. There is repose and warm humidity, and the murmur of water running unseen. It is an unusual experience in the south of Spain, this easy opulence of foliage out of a wet loam, so there is no sense of height. A shady avenue leads up straight to the open Plaza de los Algibes, a public square, an upper deck, as it were, between the palaces of the Moors and their alcazaba, the fortress. Then you can see you are well aloft.

A sharp spur of the mountains projects into the heart of Granada, and the Alhambra is built on its plateau. High battlements follow the undulations of this spur, masonry weathered into russet and yellow cliffs, and make a fastness of it.

In the remote spread underneath it of the roofs of Granada

the clear shapes of the city are diminished to an unrelated and uncertain purpose. Beyond the city to the south a plain reaches far in fallow brightness, the fertile *vêga*, its bordering hills too distant to be more than low clouds inconstant in changing airs. This citadel commands the city and the plain.

A Sultan here could feel he was god-like, rest his arms on a wall and calmly survey his dominion from a superior star. There below him was the earth, and it was his, though too far down and vague for any sign of mutiny engendering, of change coming, to be noticed by the exalted.

Perhaps the reward of a visit to the Alhambra is the surprises from its eyries. The secluded courts of the palace, from which all is shut out but the sky, are as dubiously lovely as whatever was decreed in Xanadu. You can hardly believe them. When you hear a fountain or a nightingale, or smell myrtles, that comes as a supporting reality. The eye remains wary, if delighted, while you wander about this miracle of rare device. In a dim apartment with a stalactitic ceiling of gold, and chromatic walls so intricately fretted into lace-work that you suspect the magic of a genie built them, and fear that it may get you, there is a small onel. Tip-toeing to that, for the divans have gone, you are reassured by a view of an outer world, an immensity of substance and light, with mountain peaks and snow-fields, and about them the threat of titanic storms. That looks more like life—the right rough stuff, strangely, is just outside.

The luxurious Moors were careful to have such outlooks, though for a satisfaction different from that sensed by a modern visitor who peeps out. The Arabs were content in their privacy, they were assured they had shut out all that rough stuff, up there it could not get at them. In an apartment where his women had about them an opulence of refinements to give a continuous sense of the ultimate to frangible joys, the sultan could rise and please himself with the proof of the inaccessibility of his happy sanctuary. He was apart. His magic was lucky.

He was unaware at the last that English archers, whose



grandfathers were at Agincourt, had brought their skill to Loja, and were showing how to shoot open the gates to Granada; which seems to warn us that the satisfaction we may find in building dreams from words of talismanic meaning may, like the confidence of the sultan in his exquisite seclusion, get a rude bolt clean through it. It is as well to keep strictly in mind the strength and impartiality of the elements. Better still, without a doubt, to find our support in them. Yet the Moors were pious. They studiously reminded their pride of the fact of mortality, when they were not looking for archers because unaware the shooting had begun. They could regard daily as a decoration an injunction inscribed in Arabic everywhere on the walls and pillars of their palace: There is no conqueror but God.

## HOTEL BALCONY

There are books which explain the souls of things, the soul of a people, of a country, of a war. When reality itself has less constancy than our knowledge dares to trust without proper precaution, how envious one feels of the skill of an observer who not only can discern the soul of an object, but can describe it! There is, for example, the soul of Spain, which can be as definite, it appears, as a typical Englishman or the sound policy of a government. But is it to be found in Seville cathedral or the bull-ring? And if in both, what then? I suppose we should be sentimental if while standing at an embrasure of the Alhambra looking to the white peaks of the Sierra Nevada while listening to a nightingale in a fig-tree below, we imagined the soul of the place to be about, and quite close at that moment. It is safer, in these harsh days of cynical nihilism, to keep it to oneself if sympathy is felt with Keats for his nightingale in the moonlight. Keats was wrong. His bird was born for death, like all else. Nightingales are more likely to be cursed these nights, for keeping poets awake. It is better for writers and artists now to seek well-being

in the shocks of the repellent And oddly enough, since at last I have explored the Alhambra, and have stood at Washington Irving's very window, while nightingales sang, and have tried to restore life to my own old half-forgotten yearnings while wandering in its courts, I am inclined to side with the cruel desperation of another generation which would abolish the Alhambra with romantic love and the illusions of moonlight, the rhetoric of statesmen, and the rest of the fond relics, so beautifully labelled but empty, in the show-cases Away with it! Shall us begin anew?

We live in days when we are not so sensitive to the signs of men's achievements in the long ago We do not praise famous men, but denigrate them Who now could write about the Alhambra in the way of Washington Irving? We view these monuments in critical indifference, as though a little fear, or contempt, had infected us through too close a regard of the dangerous activities of our contemporaries To-day, in one of the delicate courts of the palace, we were shown reverently the very spot where Isabella sat when she received Columbus She had won Granada at last The rule of the Moors in Spain was at an end Would it not be well to let this madman go to find the Earthly Paradise for her? As we looked at the historic marble in puzzled silence—for with those enchanting but alien surroundings it was not easy to get a clear thought—a smiling Spaniard helped us out Why should not Mr Ford, he suggested, celebrate the solemn floor by putting one of his cars there, on show?

Why not? That symbol might interpret the value which the scene in the Alhambra forecast as well as another Man's activities since the Arabs were sent packing from Europe, though they have added America to the map and have replaced its Arawaks and Caribs with engines, a Negro problem, and millions of people for whom no work can be found because of the ingenuity of machinery, seem to have taken us no further, except by the clock

It is easy to see in these old battlements of the Alhambra

only the evidence that the ambitions and artifices of the Moors, even the elaborate housing of their women and their sherbet, these luxurious pavilions in stucco and tiles instead of in flax and wool, and marble pillars for tent-poles, are the usual reminders of futility. The caliphs and the successes of their bloody intrigues have gone, swept away by the pertinacity of Ferdinand and Isabella in their desire for power. They brought about Spanish dominion and America; and now their triumph has gone to join that of the caliphs.

I had found Granada, but felt I had lost it as soon as I had found it. Its savour had gone. This is not Irving's day. What was good about Granada was adventitious. I was deploring this, back in the hotel, watching from our balcony the sun go down over the plain. There was a sheer fall of cliff to the roofs of Granada. Its houses were white, and their tiles, at that distance below, were like corrugated and lichened bark.

The snows on the mountains in the south-east, and the wheeling swifts interlacing and shrilly whistling in the upper radiance, were the last to see the sun. Night fell over the city. I had come from far to see it, but was not loath to let it go. A crescent moon set, and the stars appeared, with an unwinking and arctic brilliance in that clear air.

Then, to my wonder, I saw Granada. It was no more than one bracket-lamp showing the bluish walls of a street corner at a great depth, a street that appeared to be still in a night of the caliphs. Anything might have entered that limited nimbus. It was ready. I watched for the spirit to move whatever was to come, though nothing came while I looked down. Yet you could see that a significant drama was possible; and what a drama it could be! Beyond that lamp and the black ravines about it, the spread of Granada was the inversion of the lighted heavens. It was a lower density of stars, unwinking and near. The universe was a hollow sphere, and the constellations continued below me uninterrupted. Granada was part of the Galaxy.

THE LITTLE THINGS  
1944

## THE LITTLE THINGS

THE frost held. Winter had settled on us. It rested as hard, as cold, and as unrelenting as the war's midnight broadcast. What could be done about either? Nothing, except bend in supplication to Providence. It is too late now to think of trying to compass the least matter for oneself; as well as we know anything, the Secretary for Air ordains our weather, as somebody else governs our potatoes. The frost was still and deep. To remember a sunny bank of thyme in a south wind, and all's well, was no better than that foolish dream we have now and then of peace, with the sky as silent as it used to be when we were children, and only slow white clouds there, in the days before men were as clever as they are now.

So yesterday morning I went out into a thin fog on some errand, perhaps to learn, if I could, in the winter of which year the coals might be delivered, or perhaps humbly to petition the junta of local office-holders to allow our shattered windows to be replaced again, as arctic draughts eddying round a room where one must sit can distract attention from the eternal truth itself. I was out on this errand, whatever it was, perhaps only to post a letter, and noticed without relief or any other emotion that the local air-raid signal was at All Clear (which might have been a lie, for boys lark about with that sign, and good luck to them), and was frowning over the latest piece of world news. Now, what did *that* mean?

In fact, I walked in two fogs. The perceptible one was white, thin and icy, and the trees in it were ghostly. The snow deadened all sound except where I crunched it. My thoughts, as now you may judge, were all introverted, as

the saying is, and you may call it self-pity, or the sense of frustration, or sullen hate of the folly of fools, or any blessed thing that gratifies your well-known ability to peer into the souls of other people, though I am sure you are never guilty of so ill-mannered an extreme—what was I saying? Anyhow, I was not pleased with that morning. It was chill, twilighty, and dubious.

The winter seemed to be in accord with the doings of men—it was their very appropriate setting. The properly constituted authority—you know what I mean, one of the numerous State offices in which is divined what is good for us, against our inferior judgment—doubtless gave this frozen fog priority over less important things months ago, though it was kept secret, until released. A shoe-lace then became loose, as will happen, everybody knows, when fingers are sufficiently numbed. Despite the fog I could see where I was, and rested my foot on a familiar ledge. When this annoyance was adjusted I stood up, and stared indolently at what was before me. Then stared in wonder. Something queer had happened while my attention was downward. I was wrong in supposing I knew my whereabouts. The shrubs that ordinarily are there had gone. Nothing was there as I had known it.

This winter morning was by no means in harmony with our doings. Unlike us, it had space for leisure. It was in a sportive humour. Probably it did not care a snowflake for us. It was about its own affairs, whatever they may be—and it is no good asking—in its world apart, from which I was shut out. Anyhow, I had the instant impression that I was shut out. I could stretch my hand into that world to verify it, yet the truth of it would always avoid my apprehension, as though it were spectral. It is odd that the modern mind—and I suppose I have one, of a sort, though its value to up-to-date technology cannot be worth examination—the modern mind, I say, with its faith in exact measurements, a matter of life or death to it, rarely surmises that its calculations, which work perfectly well and therefore

are correct, are but tricks for trumpety ends. Its devotion to testing the means to its purpose may be at odds with the immeasurable purpose which keeps blacked-out London suspended among the lights between Capella and Canopus. It is beginning to appear as if the more our laboratories and test tubes tell us, the more phenomena we name and measure, the less our understanding; for did men ever know as much as they do this year, and was their understanding ever less?

I cannot tell you. All I know is that when I stood up, and saw what was immediately before me, there was a shock to my small certainties. I was even a little fearful, very like the savage alone in the forest with the silent trees about him. Or it was as if, glancing carelessly at an ancient house, vacant these many years, and said only by the vulgar to be haunted, I saw at a window, just for a moment, only for an instant, a face looking at me.

Don't ask me what I mean. I have no measurement for it. If we tried to find words for some of the ideas that faintly ahow and vanish, our friends might think we were not quite at our best. Let us leave these conjectures to the musicians. I can only say lamely that hoar-frost was up to its pranks. The sprays and branches of a dingy suburban enclosure were elaborated into a fantastic white floescence. The buds in this garden were diamonds and pearls. There were wild ornaments and fandangles where I had seen nothing before worth looking at. The pales and rails of an old fence were of a classical purity calling for preservation; it was a standard for elegance. It was the best news that had come my way for a long time.

What chance little things they are, that confirm the private thoughts we hardly dare to express to a friend, unless sure of him, and the hour is right! I remember that, when very young, I came to a tree at the bottom of our street. It had to be passed daily; a train a bit further on had to be caught. The tree never had anything to say to me. But on that morning it had. It must have had a touch of the sun. It

was a bird-cherry, and at that moment was an astonishing mixture of snowy white and pale translucent green, with rosy chaffinches darting among its pendulous flowers. I stopped, and lost the train. Worse still, I did not go dutifully to the office that day, according to rule and destiny. Somebody must have nudged me from my ancestry, for destiny was mocked. I went to Selborne instead, and loafed all day in the neighbourhood of The Wakes, I don't know why. There can be no reason for it, anyhow, that would satisfy a magistrate. It is long years ago, and what wealth, if any, I missed at the office is forgotten, but I can still get into the light of that gay morning, when I want to. The spirit of that day without a date has been of help to me since, when I disliked the look of Destiny.

The frost did not hold for long, after all. The old fence lost its elegance in a night. There was a thaw, and we were back on the news of war. We cannot keep our best moments with us all the week. The cold shadow of man is so liable to get between us and the sun. It was thawing. The air had gone southerly, and it prompted me to look—a foolish impulse—to the end of the garden, but the end of it, untrodden for months, remained as deep and unapproachable as the winter before last. Since the transforming white geometry of the frost had gone, I could note that the last gale had blown awry a young apple tree. But the tree could wait. There was plenty of time yet before the earth's warm juice would begin to rise. Lots of winter and war to come!

Yet it was a decided thaw, soft and deep. It was mild and persuasive. We were getting on. You could begin to be sure of good, as well as of evil. The feel of it made me unreasonably cheerful. Out I went to experience this new mildness. *It is enough to incline us to happiness, the surprise that a better thing, uninvited because we were unaware of its existence, is with us, is in the very house, when we were prepared to endure its opposite for an unknown period.* I noticed that the low black hill in the west had beyond



it a promise of about another half-hour's amber day, for the sun had set.

In a dusky thicket at the cross-roads a thrush was soliloquising. He fell silent as I arrived. I had paused to listen, for his voice reminded me of something, and I wished to remember what it was. It was something pleasant, yet did not suggest a name. As I stopped, so did the thrush. Then tentatively, as if the windless silence itself began to thaw, and moved in a thin and easy trickle, that bird tried over again his acceptance of his scene. His acceptance was ready, and flowed freely. He was at peace with his thicket. There was no problem in his voice. Night was already on the ground and had risen into the tree where he was. It was a tall holly, and the top of it was ramified distinctly against the last of light in the sky; and there he sat, hunched up, apparently singing in his sleep. His dreaming was like that. A few of the stars were out.

So I went home. There was nothing more to do. I could not expect to get more out of one day. It was not the time for work—the thaw did not suggest work, but release. It was not the time to read either. My books did not look as right as the black pinnacle of a holly patterned near a star. Though what the good was in that tree, for it encumbers an eligible building site, I'm not sure. Perhaps, for a moment only, it was a thing in itself, as an art critic would say, and my luck was to see it that way for the first time. There was no certainty about it, nothing real, except that you could go out many times, and search piously for it, and fail to find it. Nobody knows why such things happen as they do.

There is no reason in it, according to the nature of reason, any more than a thrush has reason when sure of his tree and his hour. He never knows what he is doing, but responds thoughtlessly when the evening is bright and liquid. My thrush was unaware of the news known to me. He could only publish all the news known to him. On that bare hill, from which the last of the day had now gone, men once lived—so the learned tell us—who used flint arrow-heads;

and I expect the thrush paused then as one of the neolithics passed by, as he did when I came along, but that other man was hurrying home with the grave tidings of the coming of strangers with bronze spears. A new era was beginning. To-day, electric pylons are on that hill, an aerodrome is near, and motor roads, yet the thrush has not learned any more, he is satisfied with the news he has.

Still, though irrational, he was also disturbing. He had taken the gist out of my books, for one thing. For there are odd moments when a hint does come of a reality hitherto fabulous, of a truth that may be everlasting, yet is contrary to all our experience. When the night is still, and the problems to be solved are such as we have, and cannot be denied, a suggestion of that kind, when one is alone, is enough to make terrible as well as ridiculous those compulsions which keep society earnest and laborious, but unhappy. What would happen if such a suggestion were dwelt upon? To what would it lead? I do not know. But it does seem hard that our earth may be a far better place than we have yet discovered, and that peace and content may be only round the corner, yet that somehow our song of praise is prevented or does not go well with Hesperus, unlike that of a silly bird.